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Faith
the greatest
power in the
world ✠ ✠

McComb





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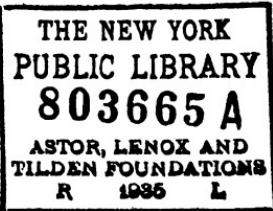
Faith the greatest power in the world

by

The Rev. Samuel McComb, D.D.



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TO ANNIE
(MRS. ROBERT RIDDELL)
AS A TOKEN OF ADMIRATION
AND AFFECTION

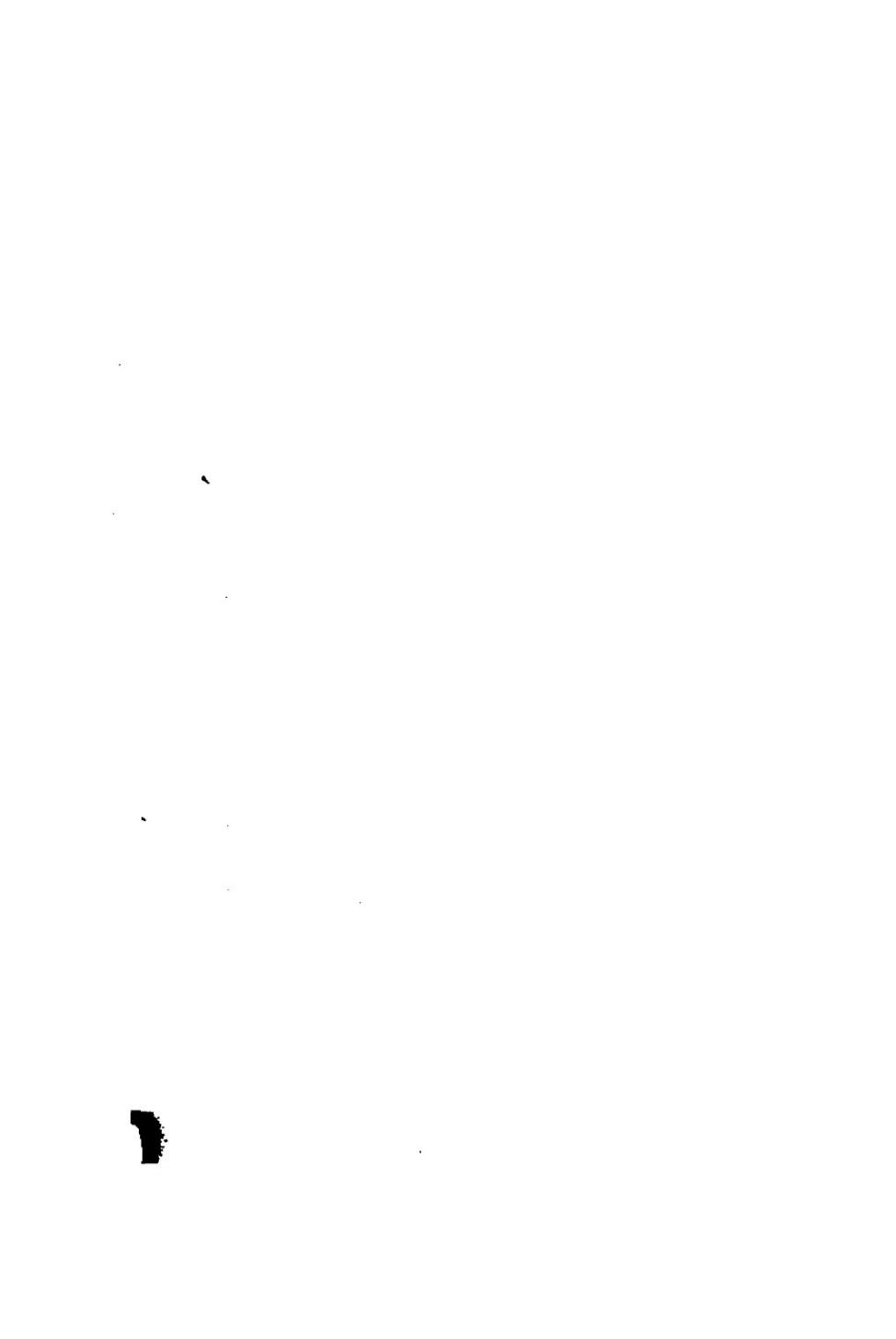
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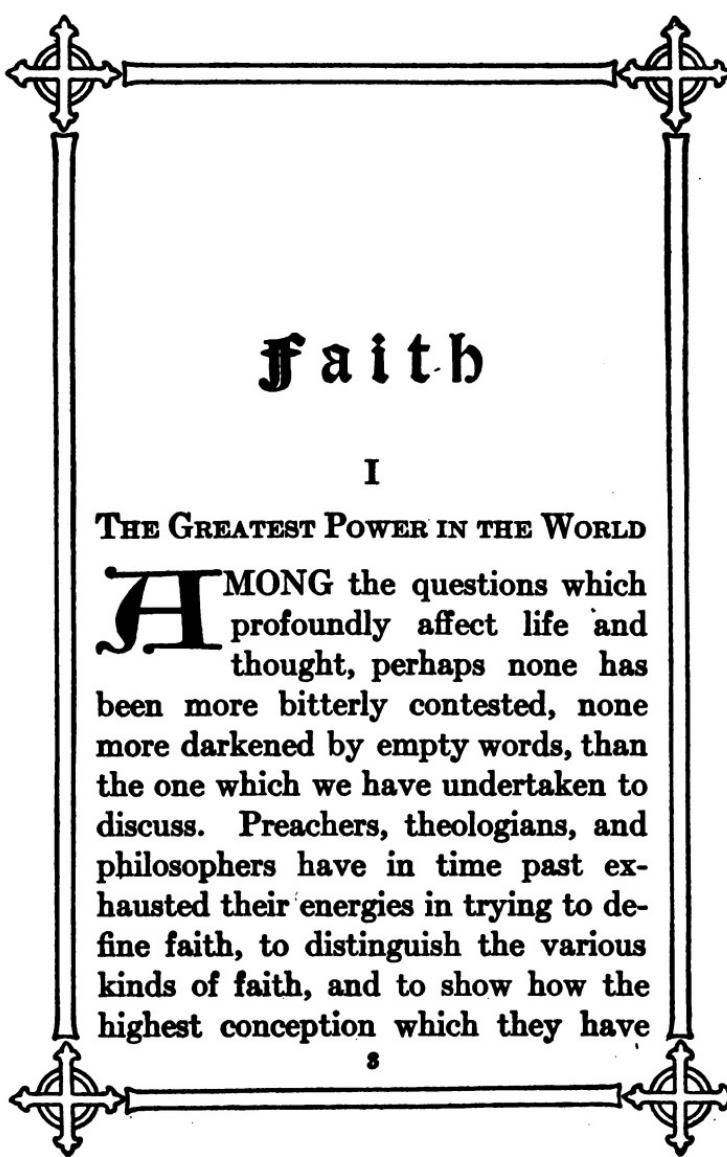
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"For man's well-being faith is properly the one thing needful. With it martyrs, otherwise weak, can cheerfully endure the shame and the cross, and without it worldlings puke up their sick existence by suicide in the midst of luxury."

Carlyle

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faith

I

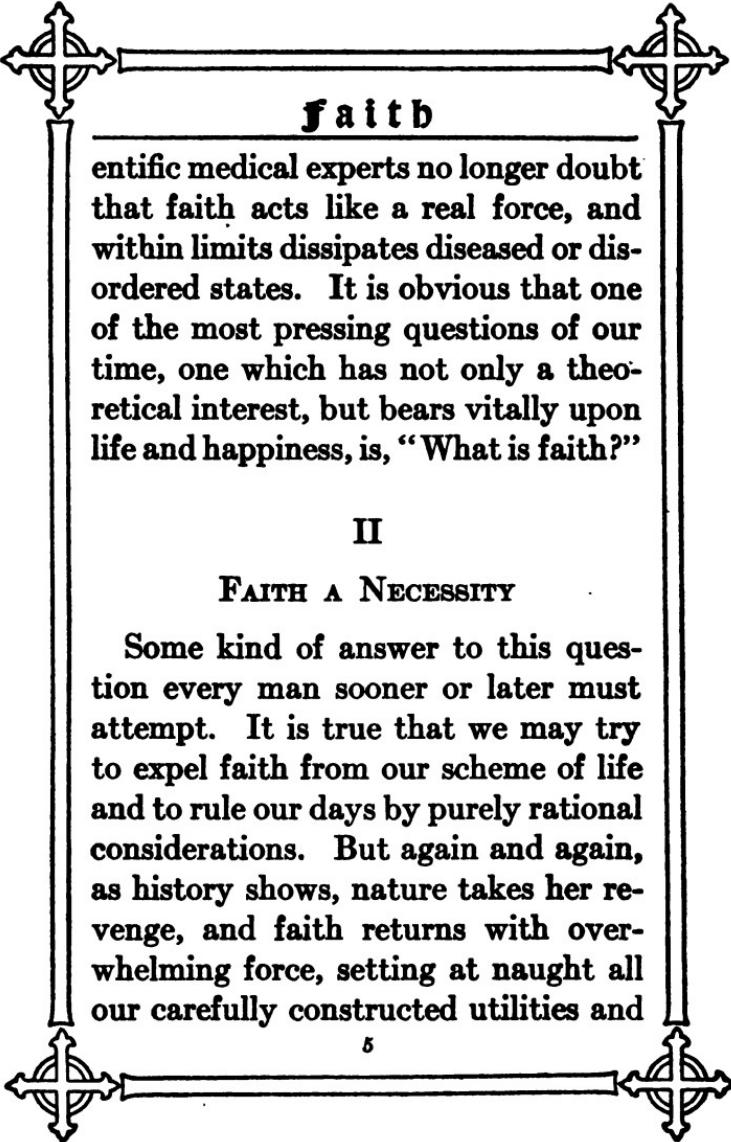
THE GREATEST POWER IN THE WORLD

AMONG the questions which profoundly affect life and thought, perhaps none has been more bitterly contested, none more darkened by empty words, than the one which we have undertaken to discuss. Preachers, theologians, and philosophers have in time past exhausted their energies in trying to define faith, to distinguish the various kinds of faith, and to show how the highest conception which they have

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been able to form of it is related to the authority of persons and institutions, on the one hand, and to the activity of reason, on the other. To-day we distrust the systems of the past, and we prefer to begin with the facts of human nature as we find them. And so the student of mind takes up the problem, and he seeks to discover how faith comes to be, with what elements in the inner life it is most deeply intertwined, and what meaning it has for the development of personality.

The rise of mystical and healing cults which magnify the worth and power of faith has brought home to us the vital bearing which it has on our individual and social welfare. It is no longer possible to dismiss these movements with a smile, for their achievements are beyond all question. Not only so, but the most rigidly sci-



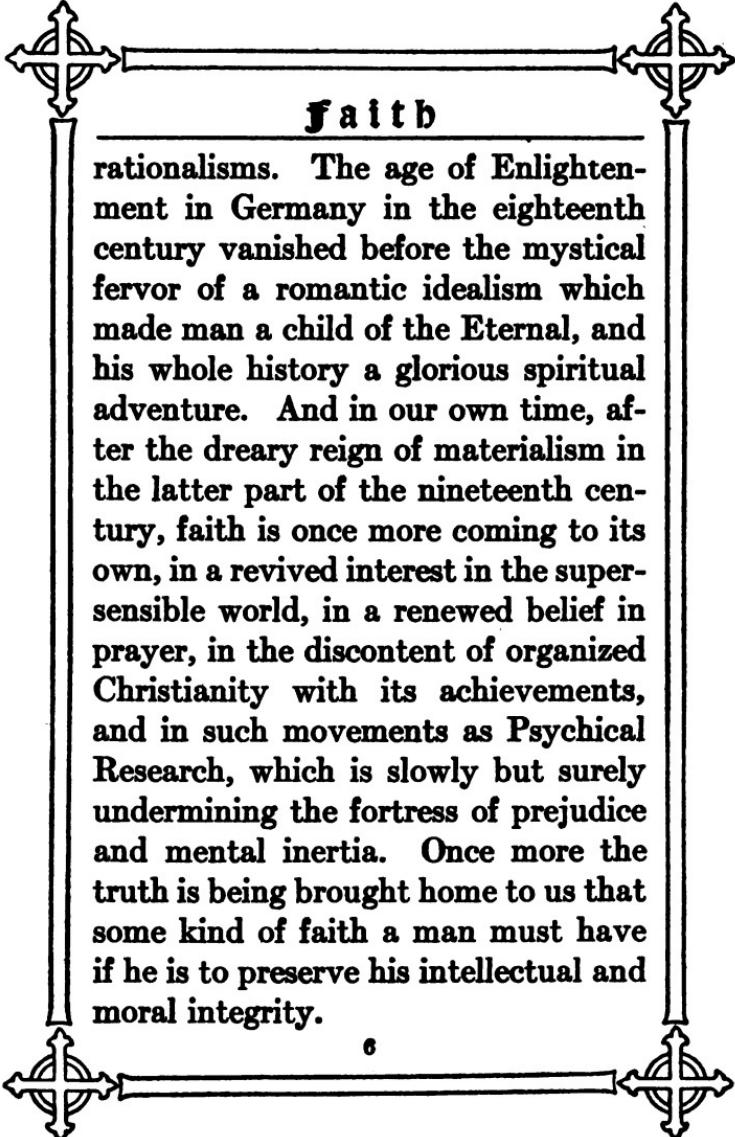
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entific medical experts no longer doubt that faith acts like a real force, and within limits dissipates diseased or disordered states. It is obvious that one of the most pressing questions of our time, one which has not only a theoretical interest, but bears vitally upon life and happiness, is, "What is faith?"

II

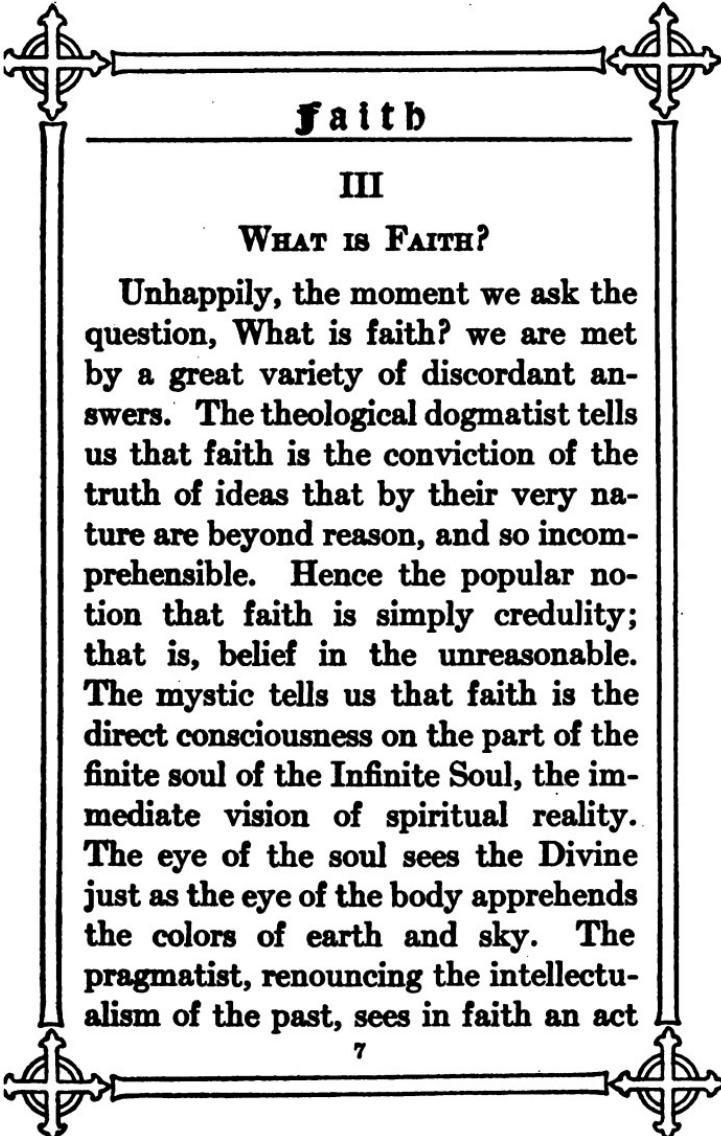
FAITH A NECESSITY

Some kind of answer to this question every man sooner or later must attempt. It is true that we may try to expel faith from our scheme of life and to rule our days by purely rational considerations. But again and again, as history shows, nature takes her revenge, and faith returns with overwhelming force, setting at naught all our carefully constructed utilities and



faith

rationalisms. The age of Enlightenment in Germany in the eighteenth century vanished before the mystical fervor of a romantic idealism which made man a child of the Eternal, and his whole history a glorious spiritual adventure. And in our own time, after the dreary reign of materialism in the latter part of the nineteenth century, faith is once more coming to its own, in a revived interest in the supersensible world, in a renewed belief in prayer, in the discontent of organized Christianity with its achievements, and in such movements as Psychical Research, which is slowly but surely undermining the fortress of prejudice and mental inertia. Once more the truth is being brought home to us that some kind of faith a man must have if he is to preserve his intellectual and moral integrity.

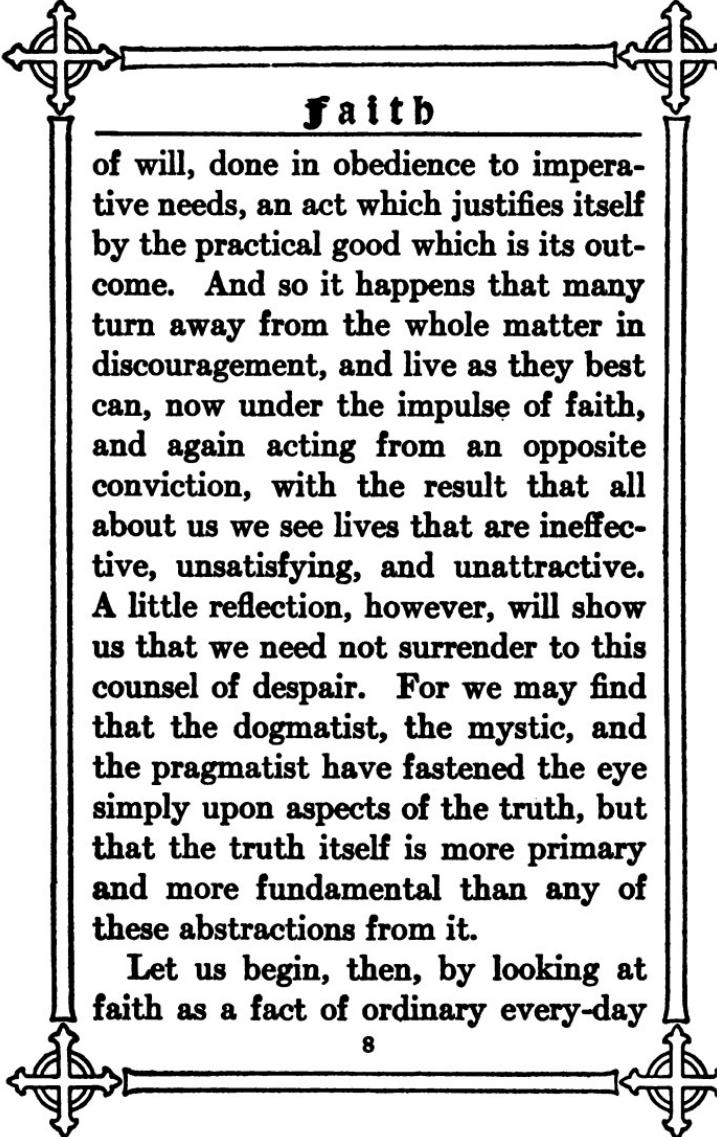


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III

WHAT IS FAITH?

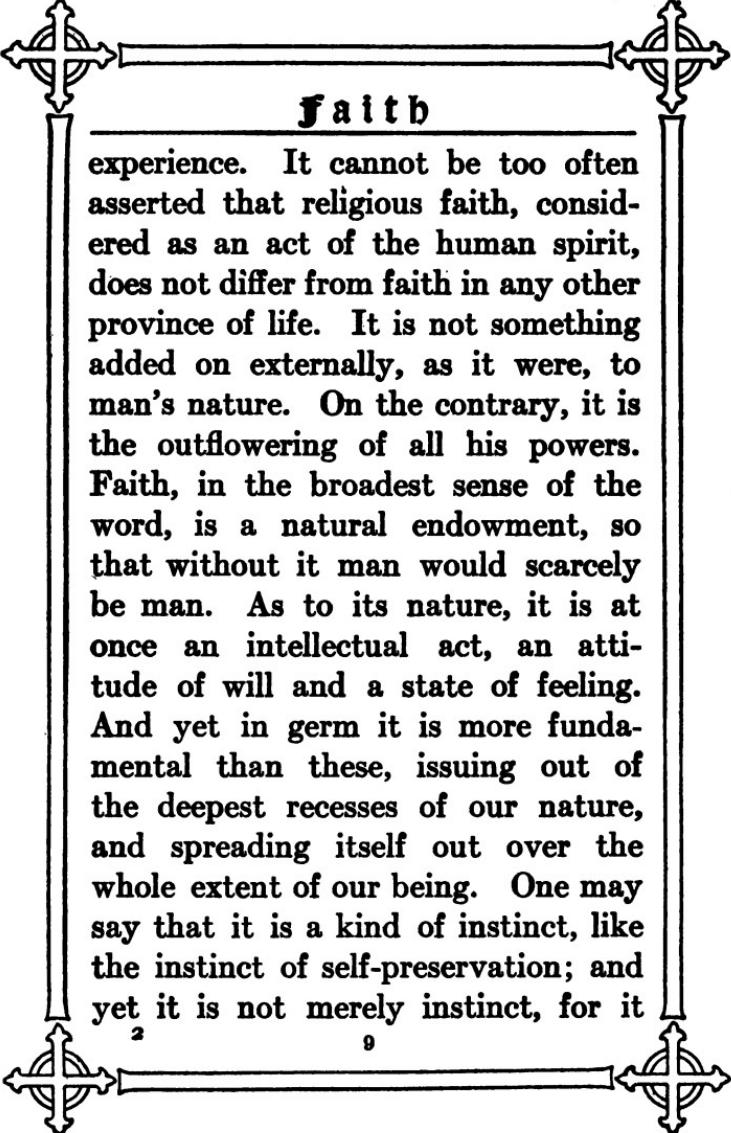
Unhappily, the moment we ask the question, What is faith? we are met by a great variety of discordant answers. The theological dogmatist tells us that faith is the conviction of the truth of ideas that by their very nature are beyond reason, and so incomprehensible. Hence the popular notion that faith is simply credulity; that is, belief in the unreasonable. The mystic tells us that faith is the direct consciousness on the part of the finite soul of the Infinite Soul, the immediate vision of spiritual reality. The eye of the soul sees the Divine just as the eye of the body apprehends the colors of earth and sky. The pragmatist, renouncing the intellectualism of the past, sees in faith an act



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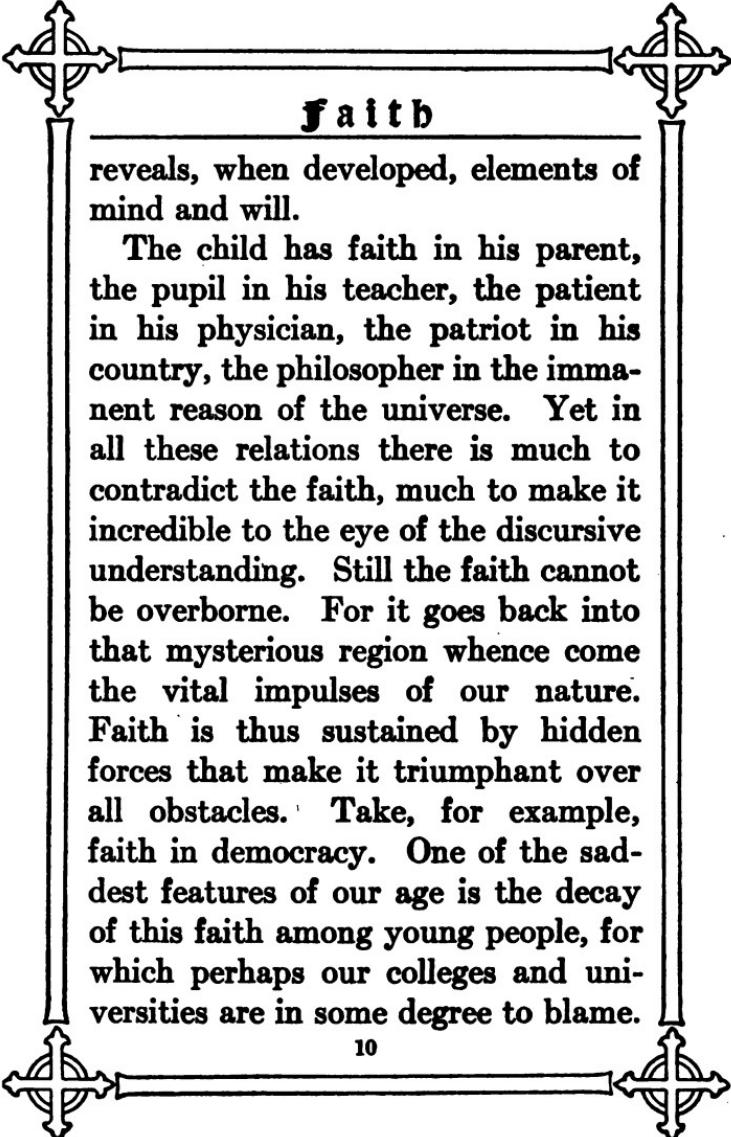
of will, done in obedience to imperative needs, an act which justifies itself by the practical good which is its outcome. And so it happens that many turn away from the whole matter in discouragement, and live as they best can, now under the impulse of faith, and again acting from an opposite conviction, with the result that all about us we see lives that are ineffective, unsatisfying, and unattractive. A little reflection, however, will show us that we need not surrender to this counsel of despair. For we may find that the dogmatist, the mystic, and the pragmatist have fastened the eye simply upon aspects of the truth, but that the truth itself is more primary and more fundamental than any of these abstractions from it.

Let us begin, then, by looking at faith as a fact of ordinary every-day



Faith

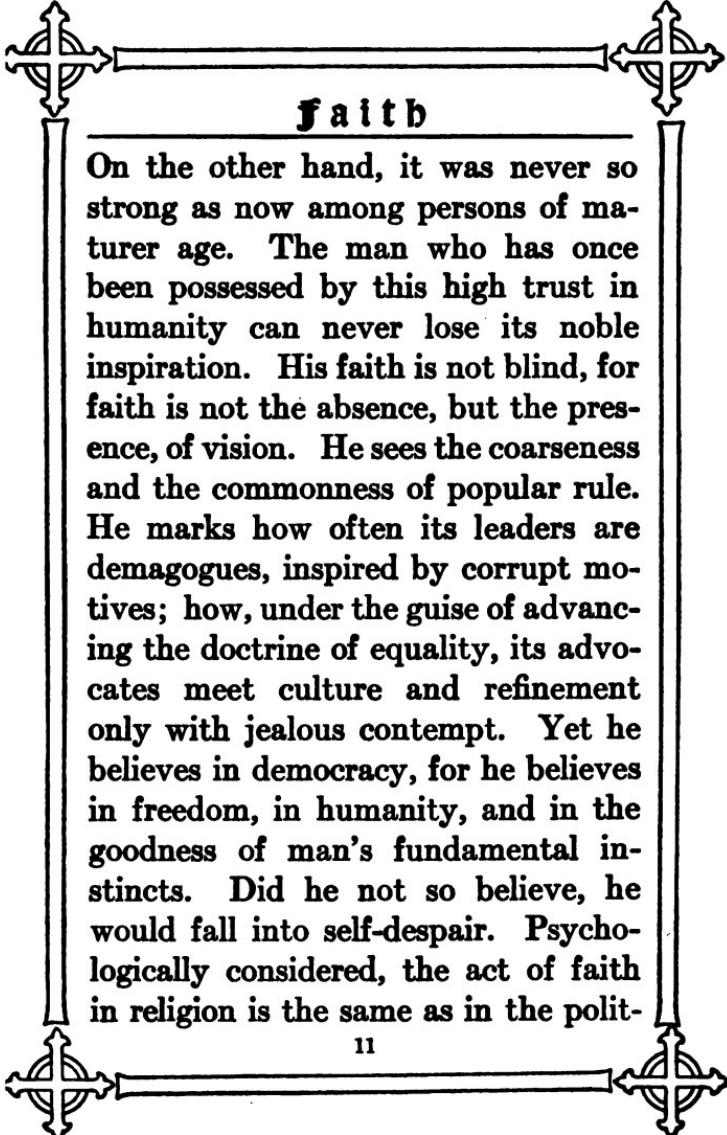
experience. It cannot be too often asserted that religious faith, considered as an act of the human spirit, does not differ from faith in any other province of life. It is not something added on externally, as it were, to man's nature. On the contrary, it is the outflowering of all his powers. Faith, in the broadest sense of the word, is a natural endowment, so that without it man would scarcely be man. As to its nature, it is at once an intellectual act, an attitude of will and a state of feeling. And yet in germ it is more fundamental than these, issuing out of the deepest recesses of our nature, and spreading itself out over the whole extent of our being. One may say that it is a kind of instinct, like the instinct of self-preservation; and yet it is not merely instinct, for it



Faith

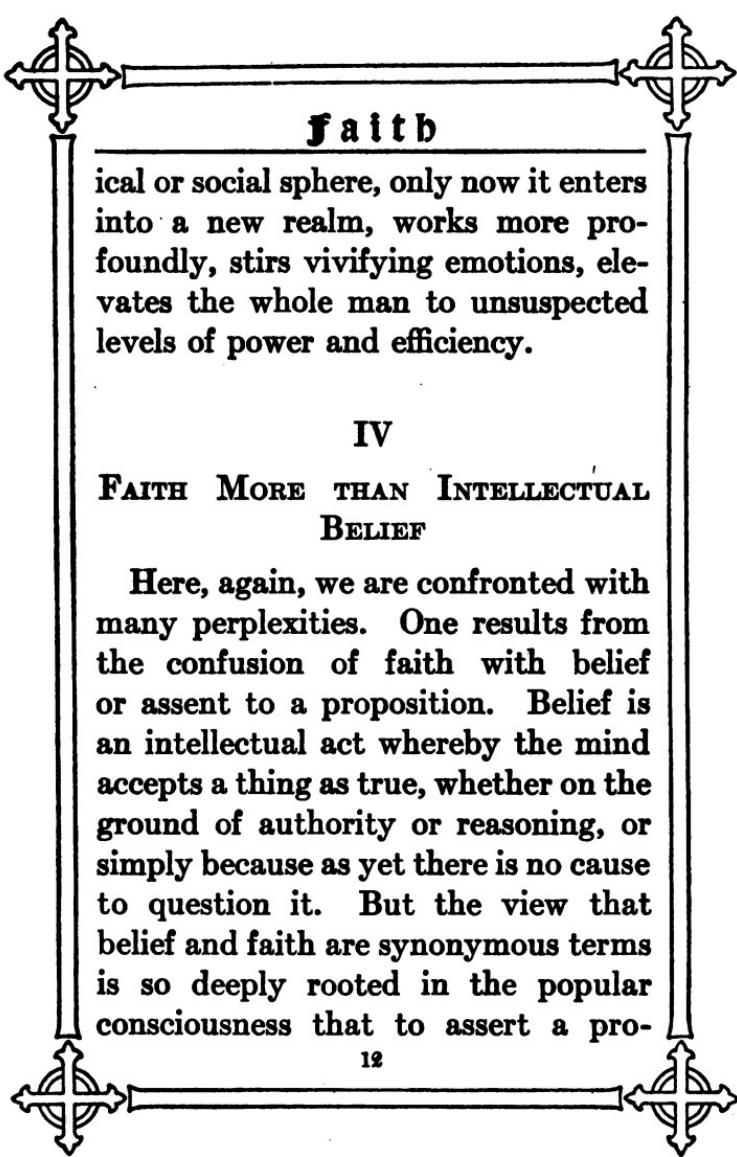
reveals, when developed, elements of mind and will.

The child has faith in his parent, the pupil in his teacher, the patient in his physician, the patriot in his country, the philosopher in the immanent reason of the universe. Yet in all these relations there is much to contradict the faith, much to make it incredible to the eye of the discursive understanding. Still the faith cannot be overborne. For it goes back into that mysterious region whence come the vital impulses of our nature. Faith is thus sustained by hidden forces that make it triumphant over all obstacles. Take, for example, faith in democracy. One of the saddest features of our age is the decay of this faith among young people, for which perhaps our colleges and universities are in some degree to blame.



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On the other hand, it was never so strong as now among persons of matured age. The man who has once been possessed by this high trust in humanity can never lose its noble inspiration. His faith is not blind, for faith is not the absence, but the presence, of vision. He sees the coarseness and the commonness of popular rule. He marks how often its leaders are demagogues, inspired by corrupt motives; how, under the guise of advancing the doctrine of equality, its advocates meet culture and refinement only with jealous contempt. Yet he believes in democracy, for he believes in freedom, in humanity, and in the goodness of man's fundamental instincts. Did he not so believe, he would fall into self-despair. Psychologically considered, the act of faith in religion is the same as in the polit-



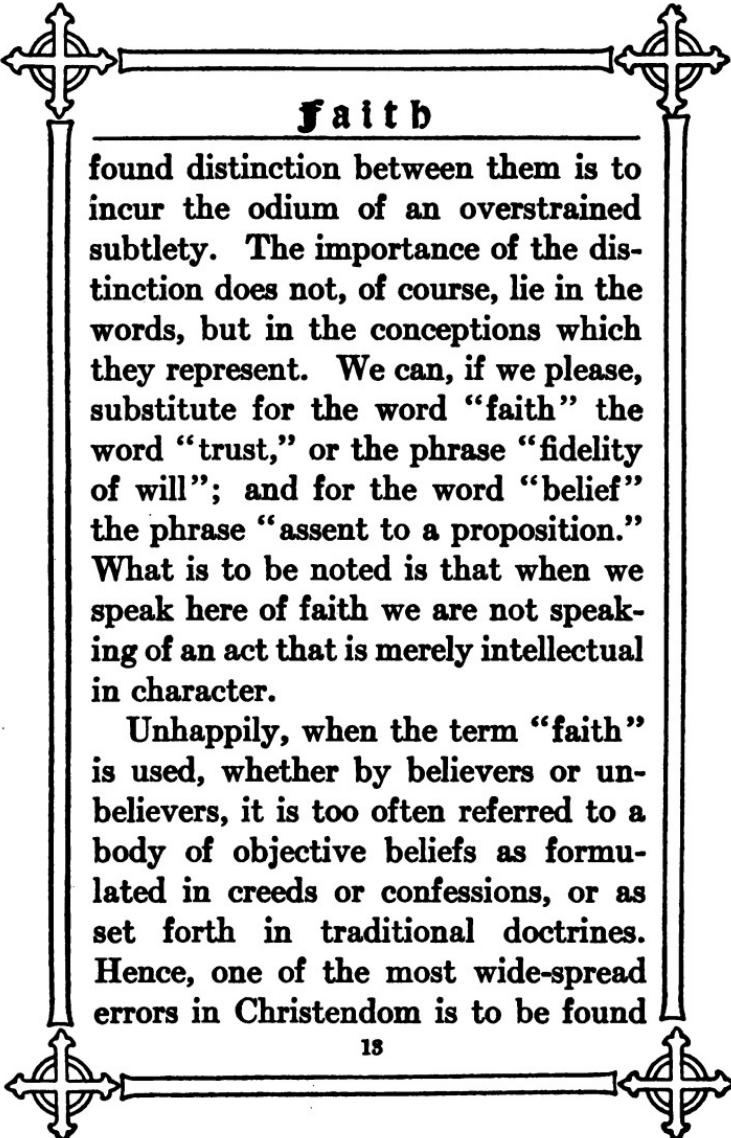
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ical or social sphere, only now it enters into a new realm, works more profoundly, stirs vivifying emotions, elevates the whole man to unsuspected levels of power and efficiency.

IV

FAITH MORE THAN INTELLECTUAL BELIEF

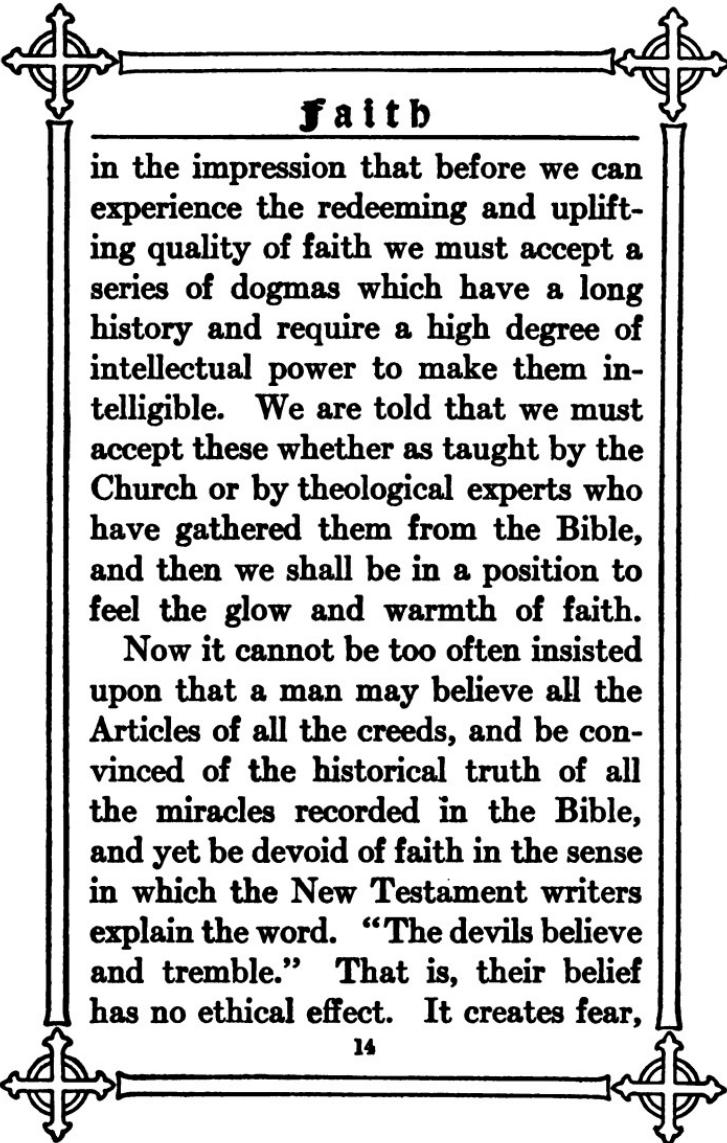
Here, again, we are confronted with many perplexities. One results from the confusion of faith with belief or assent to a proposition. Belief is an intellectual act whereby the mind accepts a thing as true, whether on the ground of authority or reasoning, or simply because as yet there is no cause to question it. But the view that belief and faith are synonymous terms is so deeply rooted in the popular consciousness that to assert a pro-



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found distinction between them is to incur the odium of an overstrained subtlety. The importance of the distinction does not, of course, lie in the words, but in the conceptions which they represent. We can, if we please, substitute for the word "faith" the word "trust," or the phrase "fidelity of will"; and for the word "belief" the phrase "assent to a proposition." What is to be noted is that when we speak here of faith we are not speaking of an act that is merely intellectual in character.

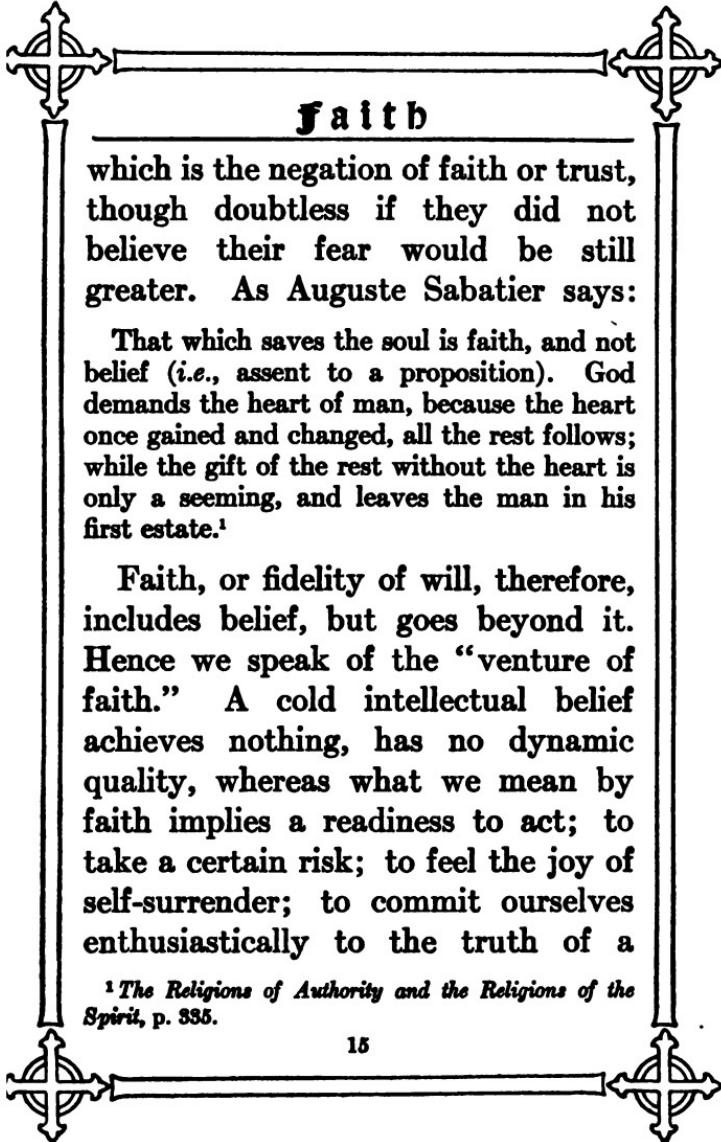
Unhappily, when the term "faith" is used, whether by believers or unbelievers, it is too often referred to a body of objective beliefs as formulated in creeds or confessions, or as set forth in traditional doctrines. Hence, one of the most wide-spread errors in Christendom is to be found



faith

in the impression that before we can experience the redeeming and uplifting quality of faith we must accept a series of dogmas which have a long history and require a high degree of intellectual power to make them intelligible. We are told that we must accept these whether as taught by the Church or by theological experts who have gathered them from the Bible, and then we shall be in a position to feel the glow and warmth of faith.

Now it cannot be too often insisted upon that a man may believe all the Articles of all the creeds, and be convinced of the historical truth of all the miracles recorded in the Bible, and yet be devoid of faith in the sense in which the New Testament writers explain the word. "The devils believe and tremble." That is, their belief has no ethical effect. It creates fear,



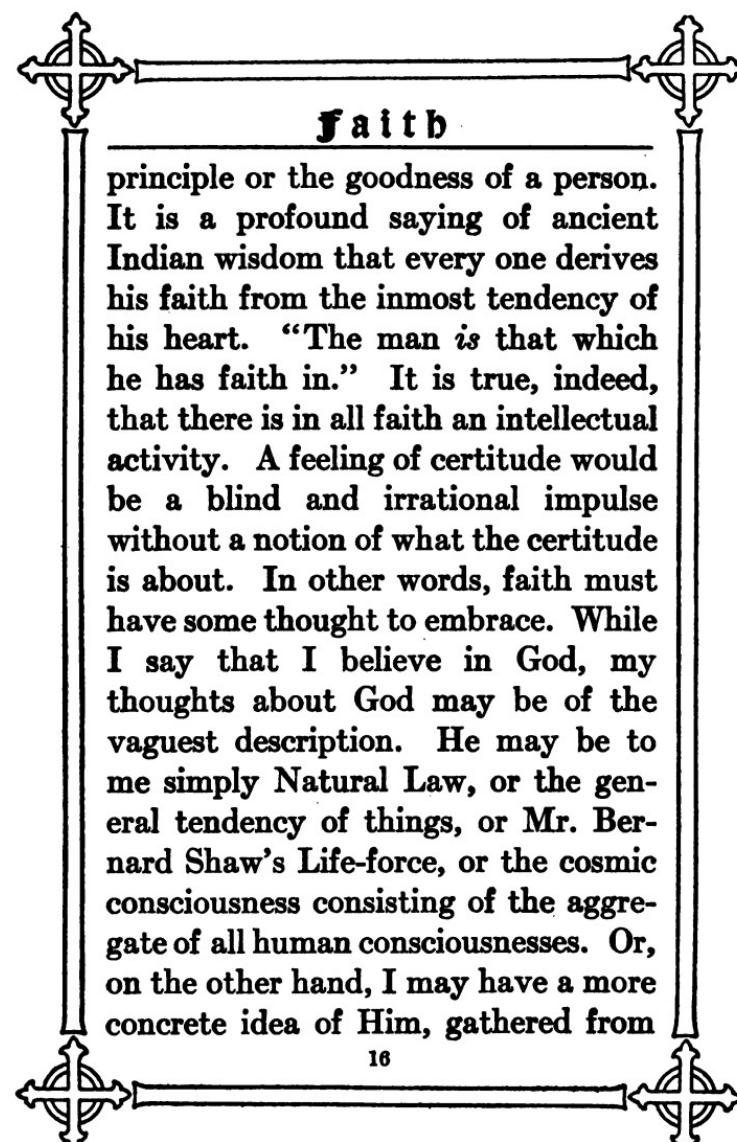
Faith

which is the negation of faith or trust, though doubtless if they did not believe their fear would be still greater. As Auguste Sabatier says:

That which saves the soul is faith, and not belief (*i.e.*, assent to a proposition). God demands the heart of man, because the heart once gained and changed, all the rest follows; while the gift of the rest without the heart is only a seeming, and leaves the man in his first estate.¹

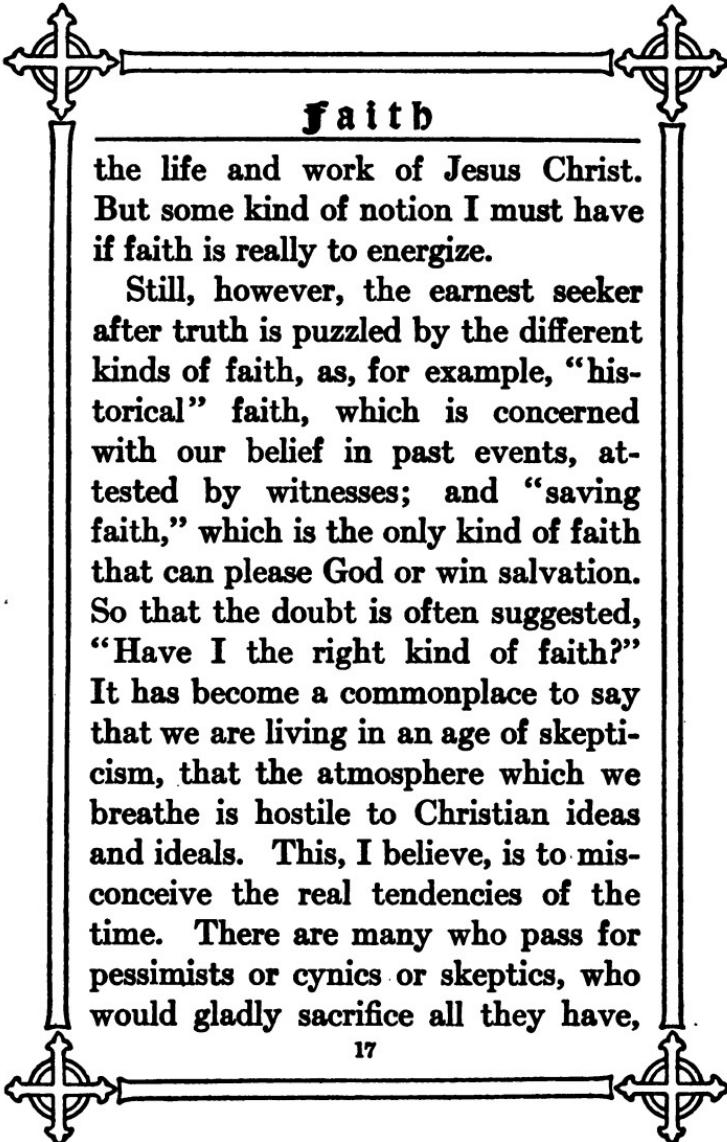
Faith, or fidelity of will, therefore, includes belief, but goes beyond it. Hence we speak of the "venture of faith." A cold intellectual belief achieves nothing, has no dynamic quality, whereas what we mean by faith implies a readiness to act; to take a certain risk; to feel the joy of self-surrender; to commit ourselves enthusiastically to the truth of a

¹ *The Religions of Authority and the Religions of the Spirit*, p. 335.



faith

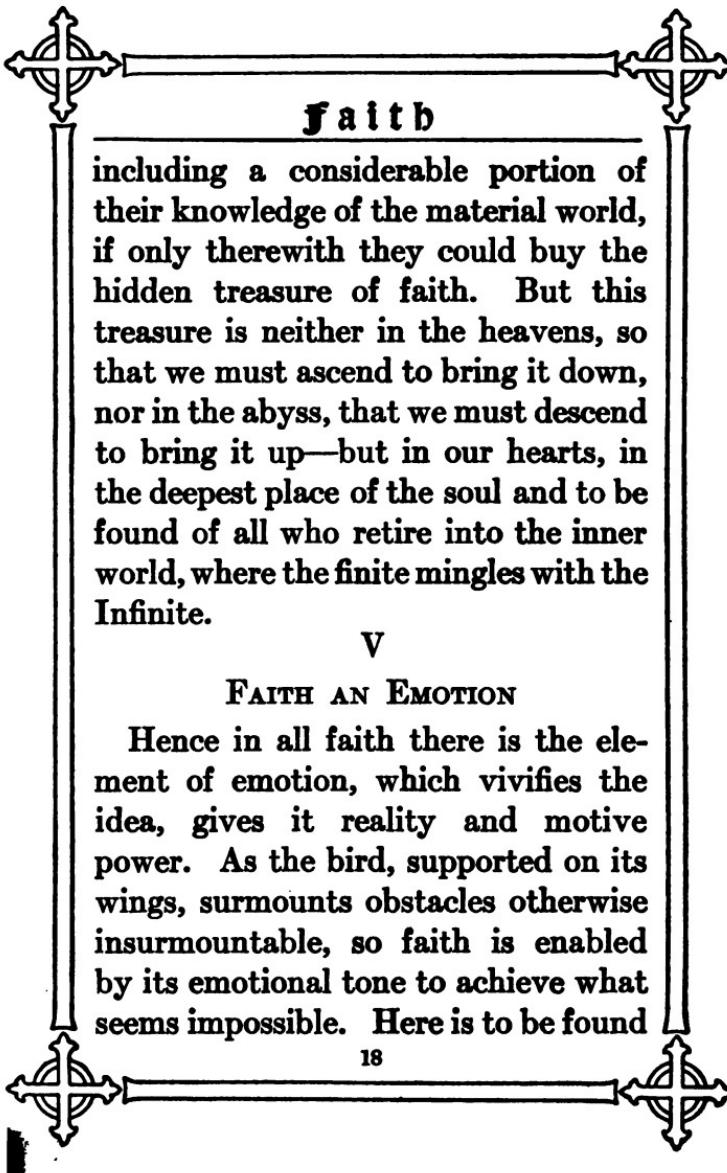
principle or the goodness of a person. It is a profound saying of ancient Indian wisdom that every one derives his faith from the inmost tendency of his heart. "The man *is* that which he has faith in." It is true, indeed, that there is in all faith an intellectual activity. A feeling of certitude would be a blind and irrational impulse without a notion of what the certitude is about. In other words, faith must have some thought to embrace. While I say that I believe in God, my thoughts about God may be of the vaguest description. He may be to me simply Natural Law, or the general tendency of things, or Mr. Bernard Shaw's Life-force, or the cosmic consciousness consisting of the aggregate of all human consciousnesses. Or, on the other hand, I may have a more concrete idea of Him, gathered from



faith

the life and work of Jesus Christ. But some kind of notion I must have if faith is really to energize.

Still, however, the earnest seeker after truth is puzzled by the different kinds of faith, as, for example, "historical" faith, which is concerned with our belief in past events, attested by witnesses; and "saving faith," which is the only kind of faith that can please God or win salvation. So that the doubt is often suggested, "Have I the right kind of faith?" It has become a commonplace to say that we are living in an age of skepticism, that the atmosphere which we breathe is hostile to Christian ideas and ideals. This, I believe, is to misconceive the real tendencies of the time. There are many who pass for pessimists or cynics or skeptics, who would gladly sacrifice all they have,



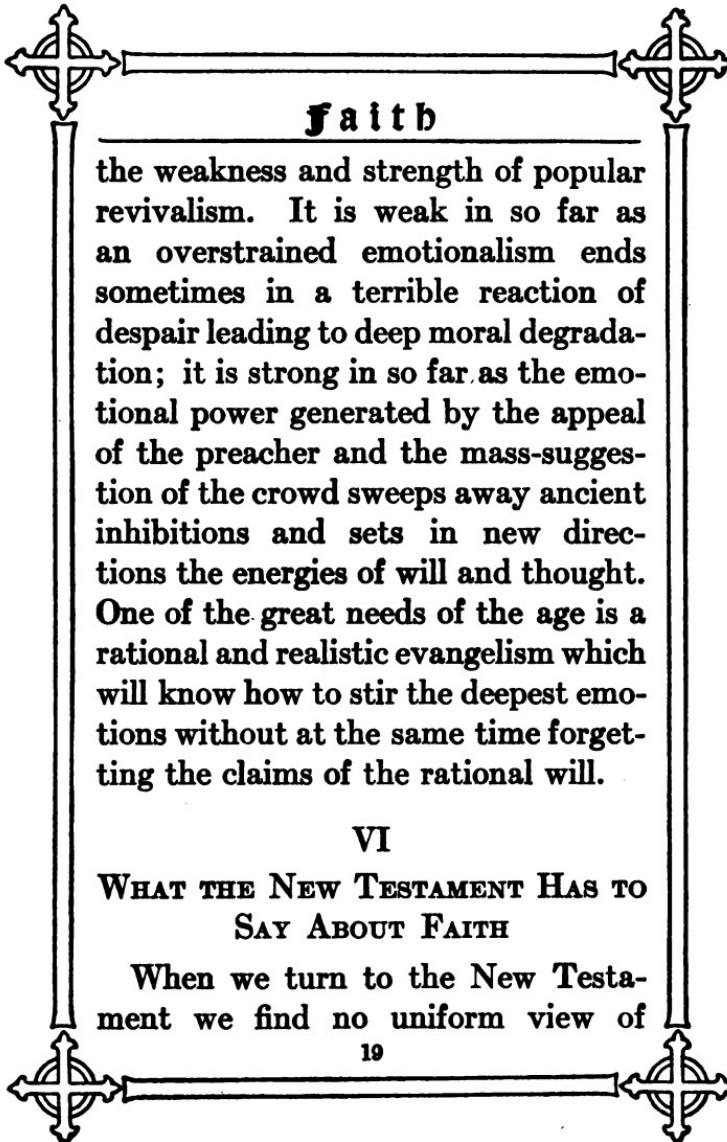
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including a considerable portion of their knowledge of the material world, if only therewith they could buy the hidden treasure of faith. But this treasure is neither in the heavens, so that we must ascend to bring it down, nor in the abyss, that we must descend to bring it up—but in our hearts, in the deepest place of the soul and to be found of all who retire into the inner world, where the finite mingles with the Infinite.

V

FAITH AN EMOTION

Hence in all faith there is the element of emotion, which vivifies the idea, gives it reality and motive power. As the bird, supported on its wings, surmounts obstacles otherwise insurmountable, so faith is enabled by its emotional tone to achieve what seems impossible. Here is to be found



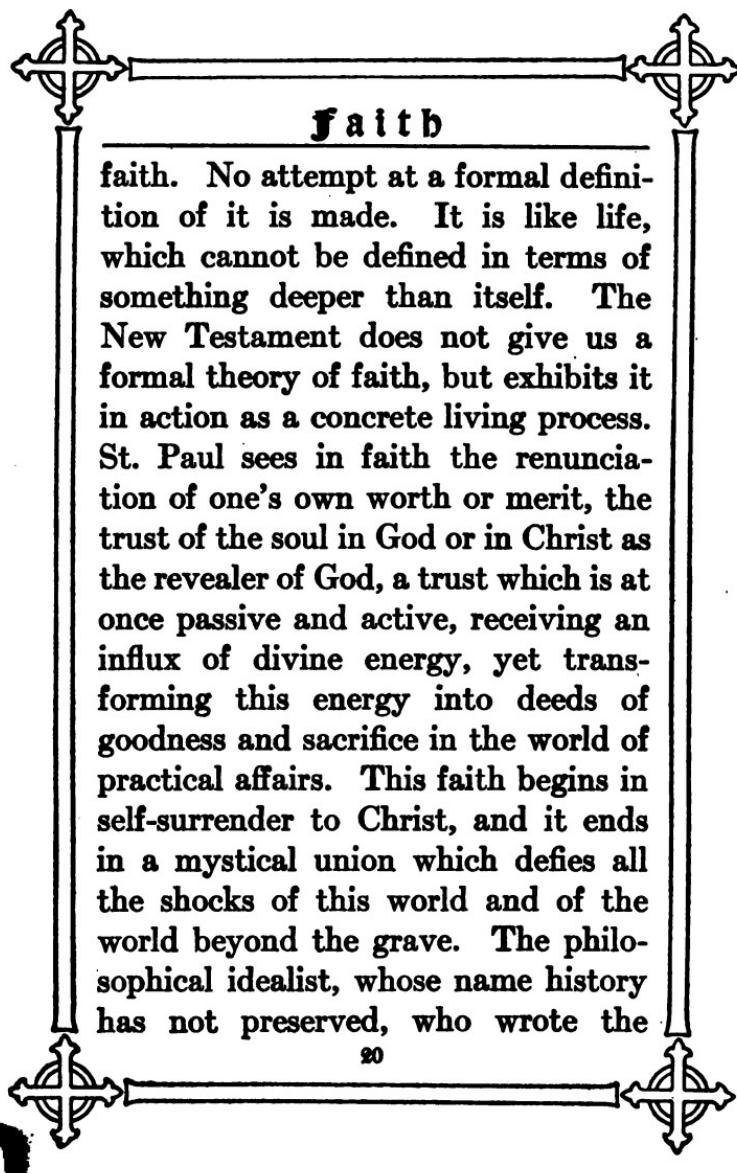
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the weakness and strength of popular revivalism. It is weak in so far as an overstrained emotionalism ends sometimes in a terrible reaction of despair leading to deep moral degradation; it is strong in so far as the emotional power generated by the appeal of the preacher and the mass-suggestion of the crowd sweeps away ancient inhibitions and sets in new directions the energies of will and thought. One of the great needs of the age is a rational and realistic evangelism which will know how to stir the deepest emotions without at the same time forgetting the claims of the rational will.

VI

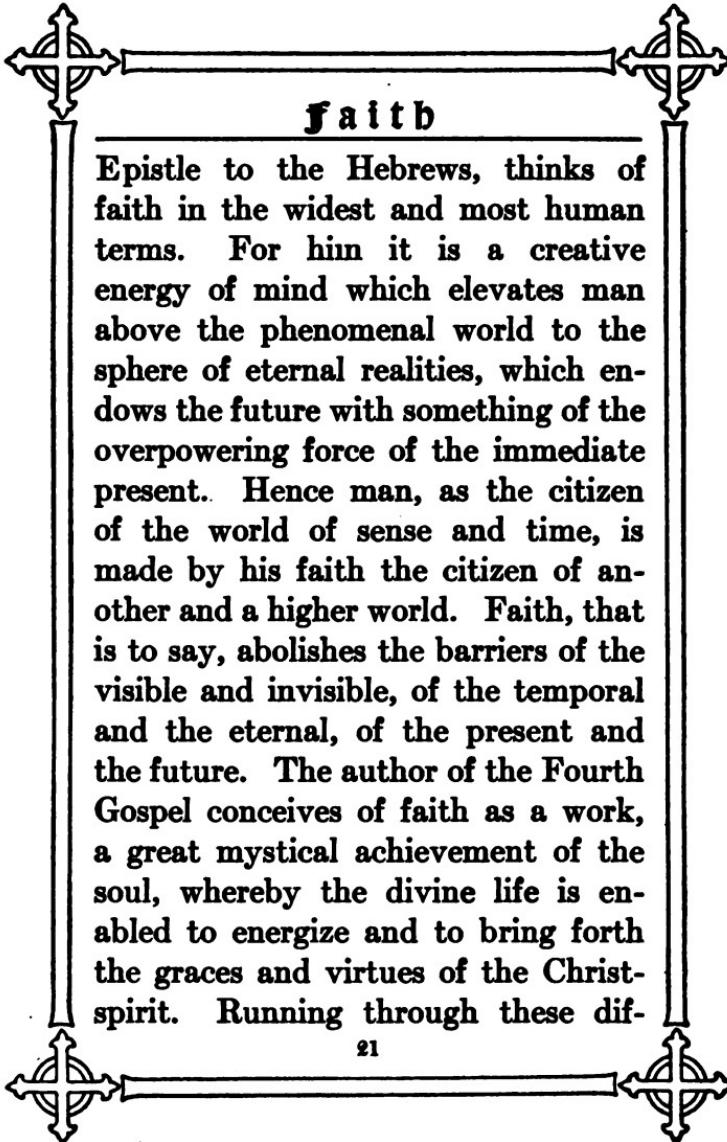
WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT HAS TO SAY ABOUT FAITH

When we turn to the New Testament we find no uniform view of



Faith

faith. No attempt at a formal definition of it is made. It is like life, which cannot be defined in terms of something deeper than itself. The New Testament does not give us a formal theory of faith, but exhibits it in action as a concrete living process. St. Paul sees in faith the renunciation of one's own worth or merit, the trust of the soul in God or in Christ as the revealer of God, a trust which is at once passive and active, receiving an influx of divine energy, yet transforming this energy into deeds of goodness and sacrifice in the world of practical affairs. This faith begins in self-surrender to Christ, and it ends in a mystical union which defies all the shocks of this world and of the world beyond the grave. The philosophical idealist, whose name history has not preserved, who wrote the



faith

Epistle to the Hebrews, thinks of faith in the widest and most human terms. For him it is a creative energy of mind which elevates man above the phenomenal world to the sphere of eternal realities, which endows the future with something of the overpowering force of the immediate present. Hence man, as the citizen of the world of sense and time, is made by his faith the citizen of another and a higher world. Faith, that is to say, abolishes the barriers of the visible and invisible, of the temporal and the eternal, of the present and the future. The author of the Fourth Gospel conceives of faith as a work, a great mystical achievement of the soul, whereby the divine life is enabled to energize and to bring forth the graces and virtues of the Christ-spirit. Running through these dif-

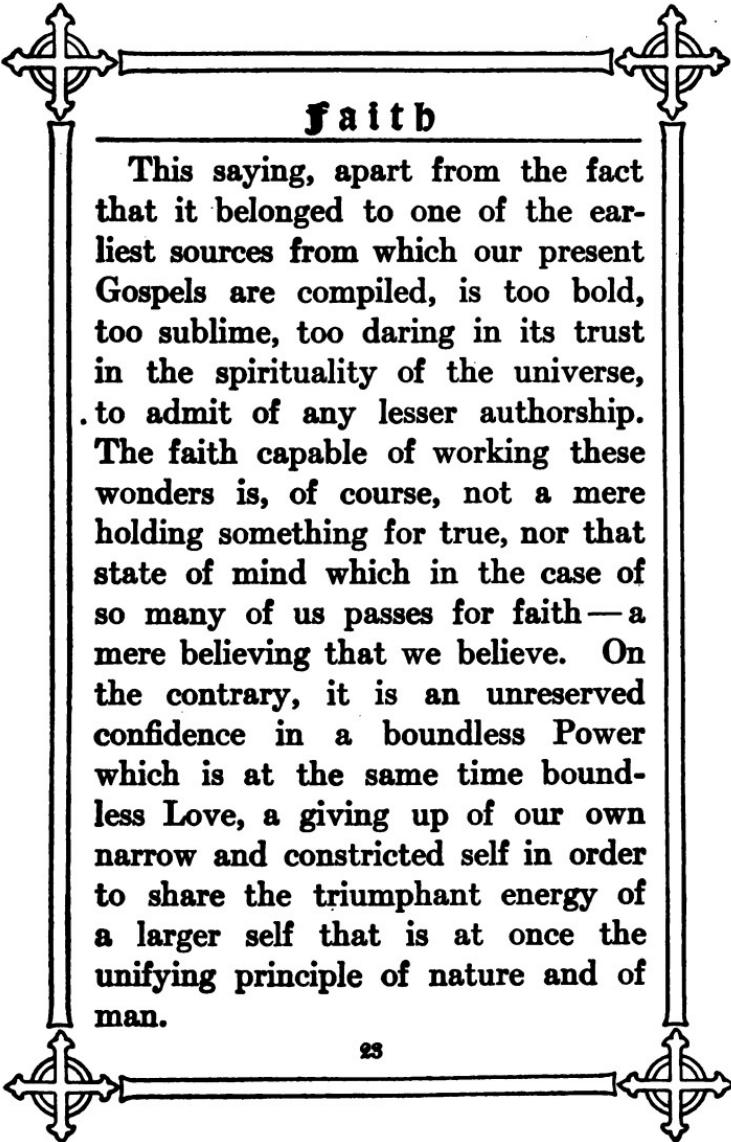
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ferent conceptions, which have been rather hinted at than fully stated, there is a thread which gives them unity and harmony. This thread is the idea of trust or confidence. Everywhere in the New Testament the word translated "faith" implies a going forth of the spirit in trustful self-surrender toward a person or a principle worthy of the soul's reverence.

But what concerns us most is the way in which the Founder of the Christian religion loved to think of faith. There is an utterance of His which here deserves special attention:

If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.¹

¹Matthew xvii, 20. Cp. Luke xvii, 6. Matthew preserves the form as it stood in Q., a document now lost, but standing behind our present Gospels.



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This saying, apart from the fact that it belonged to one of the earliest sources from which our present Gospels are compiled, is too bold, too sublime, too daring in its trust in the spirituality of the universe, to admit of any lesser authorship. The faith capable of working these wonders is, of course, not a mere holding something for true, nor that state of mind which in the case of so many of us passes for faith—a mere believing that we believe. On the contrary, it is an unreserved confidence in a boundless Power which is at the same time boundless Love, a giving up of our own narrow and constricted self in order to share the triumphant energy of a larger self that is at once the unifying principle of nature and of man.

VII

FAITH THE SECRET OF CHRIST'S PERSONALITY AND THE SOUL OF HIS RELIGION

This utterance leads us into the secret of Christ's personality. The more one studies His words and acts, especially in the light which modern research has thrown upon them, the more is one convinced that His life and mission become explicable only through the principle of faith. He had a trust in God that nothing could shake, no doubt nor fear of fate. This was why He could Himself remove mountains, could lift the burden of disease by evoking faith, which was the necessary psychic medium for the transmission of His healing virtue. This was why He could, immediately after His rejection at Naza-

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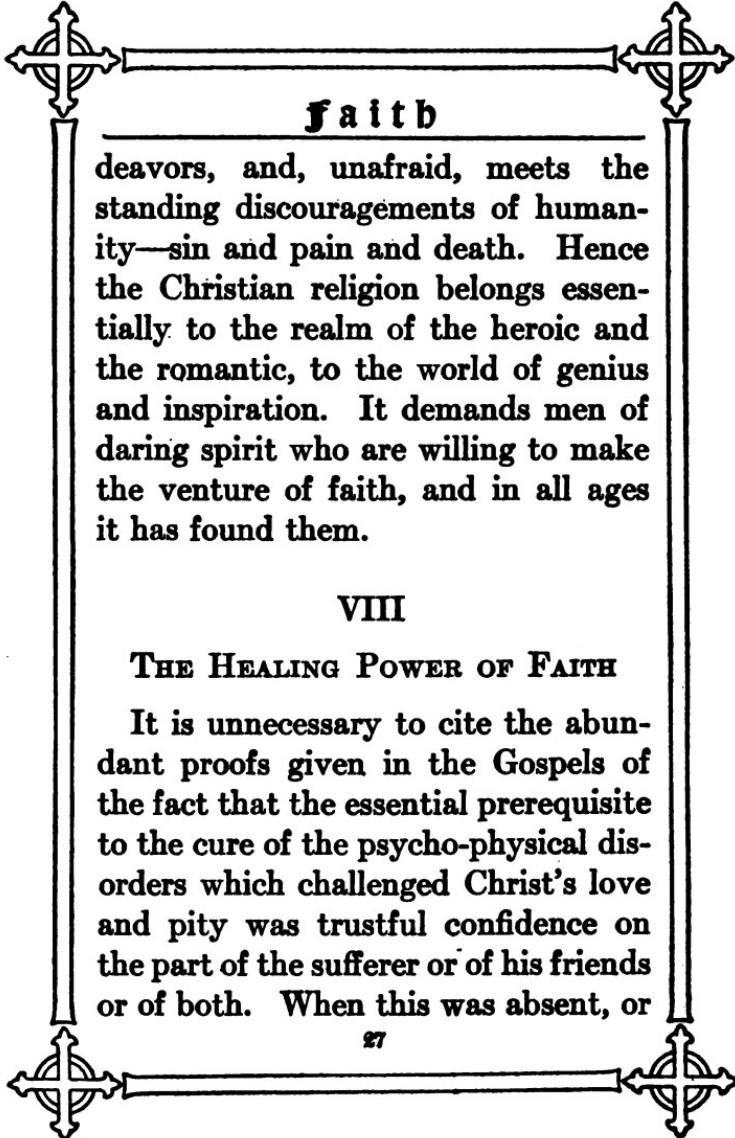
reth, send forth His disciples as trumpeters to herald the victorious approach of the new kingdom, of a good time coming. This was why He could bend history to His will, abolish an age-long order, and create a religion which to-day, amid the myriad faiths of humanity, has only one serious rival. This was why He was an optimist, and could see in the universe nothing but goodness, happiness, and beauty against which sin and shame and sorrow were but a fleeting shadow implying light, a "silence implying sound."

Hence for Christ the heart and soul of religion and life is faith. The typical citizen of the Kingdom is the child, with his uplifted, eager glance and trustful heart. Wherever He finds the child-spirit He approves it, for He sees in it the possibility of all growth; and it is one of his great

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ideas that in the history of the soul the cardinal fact is the fact of growth. He does not speak as a philosopher or a theologian, but as a poet. He does not define faith, nor analyze it into its constituent elements, nor does He offer any systematic exposition of its various relations. In the main He is content with fastening the eye on its *dynamic* quality, and with seeking to awaken or to strengthen it in the hearts of his hearers.

For Him, faith is one of the living forces of the universe. It can do things; nay, more—it can achieve what to the eye of prosaic sense appears unachievable. It is the key to the kingdom of holiness and health. In virtue of its mystic touch man gains in a moment dominion over himself and over the world. Armed with it, the soul goes forth to ever-fresh en-



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deavors, and, unafraid, meets the standing discouragements of humanity—sin and pain and death. Hence the Christian religion belongs essentially to the realm of the heroic and the romantic, to the world of genius and inspiration. It demands men of daring spirit who are willing to make the venture of faith, and in all ages it has found them.

VIII

THE HEALING POWER OF FAITH

It is unnecessary to cite the abundant proofs given in the Gospels of the fact that the essential prerequisite to the cure of the psycho-physical disorders which challenged Christ's love and pity was trustful confidence on the part of the sufferer or of his friends or of both. When this was absent, or

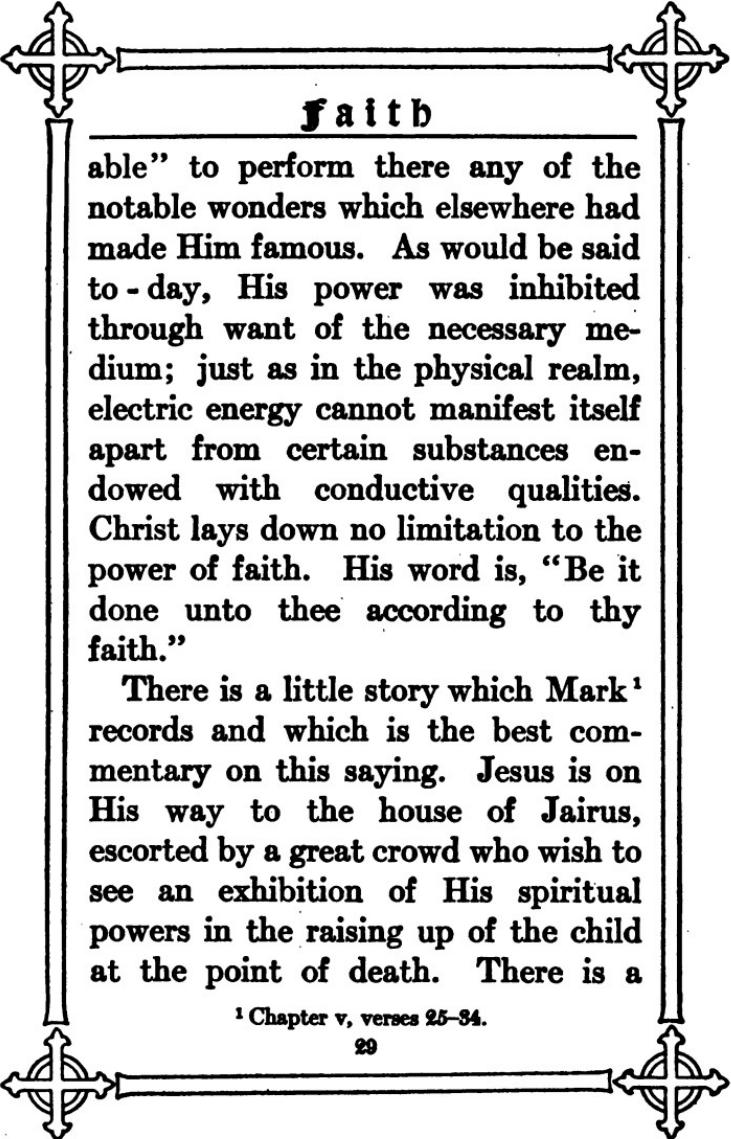
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present only in a feeble degree, little or no good resulted. True to the psychology of the situation is the remark of the Evangelist that the men and women among whom Jesus had grown up were perplexed at the contrast between His humble origin and the arresting character of His words and acts. Unable to solve this contradiction, they refused to believe in His message. In such an atmosphere the Wonder-worker was almost powerless.

“He was not able to do any work of power, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them, and He marveled because of their unbelief.”¹

The few whom He did cure had faith enough for his word to take effect. With striking simplicity the Gospel writer says that “He was not

¹ Mark vi, 5.

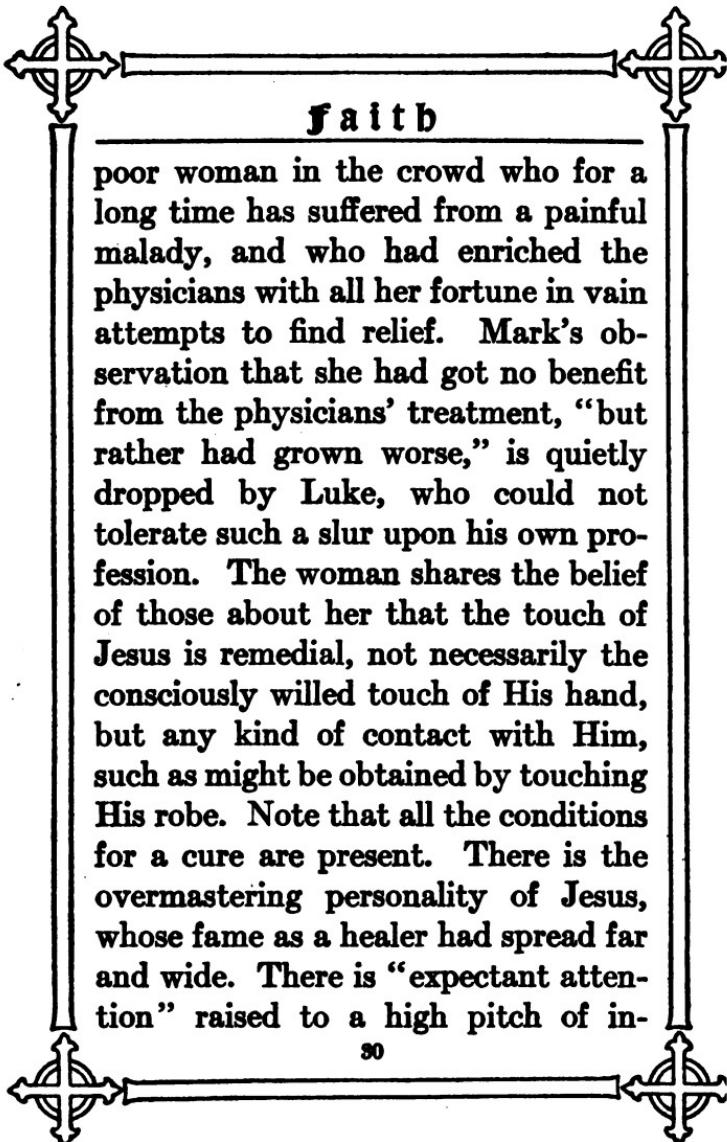


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able" to perform there any of the notable wonders which elsewhere had made Him famous. As would be said to-day, His power was inhibited through want of the necessary medium; just as in the physical realm, electric energy cannot manifest itself apart from certain substances endowed with conductive qualities. Christ lays down no limitation to the power of faith. His word is, "Be it done unto thee according to thy faith."

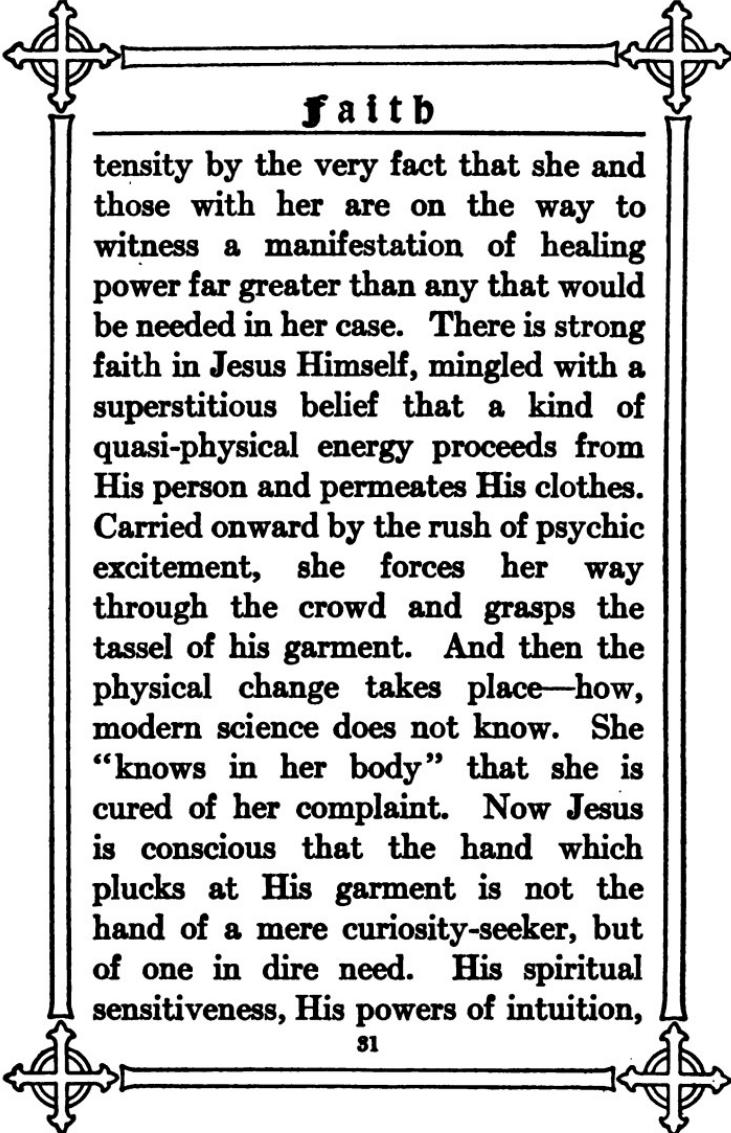
There is a little story which Mark¹ records and which is the best commentary on this saying. Jesus is on His way to the house of Jairus, escorted by a great crowd who wish to see an exhibition of His spiritual powers in the raising up of the child at the point of death. There is a

¹ Chapter v, verses 25-34.



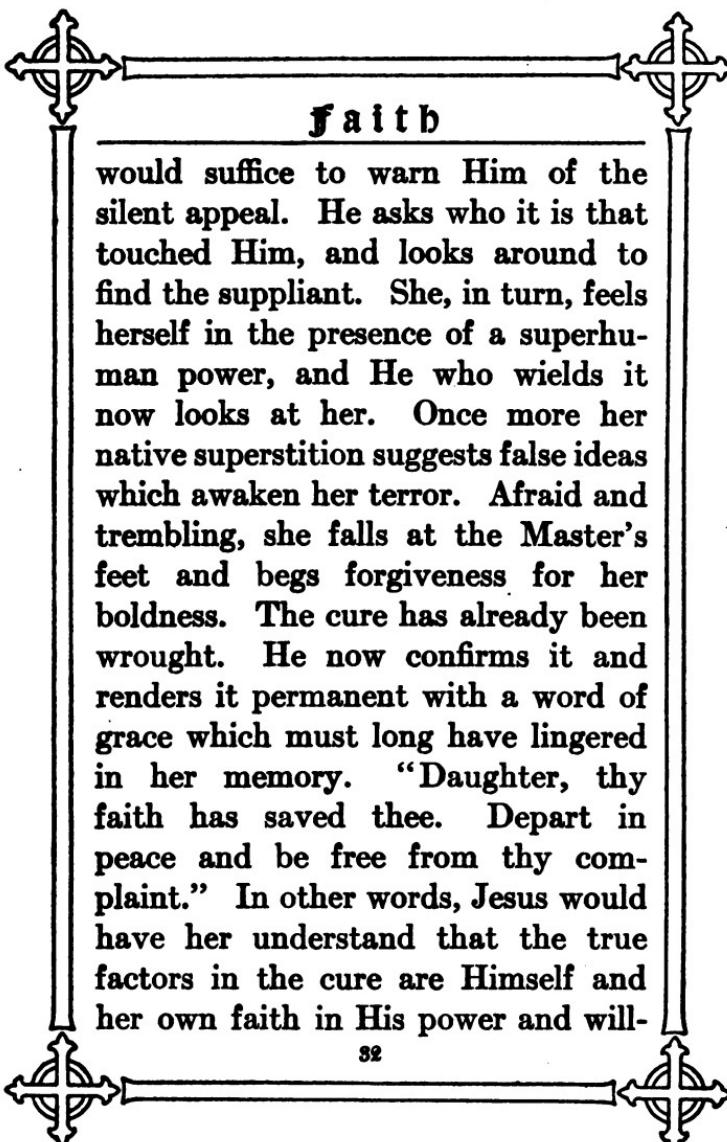
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poor woman in the crowd who for a long time has suffered from a painful malady, and who had enriched the physicians with all her fortune in vain attempts to find relief. Mark's observation that she had got no benefit from the physicians' treatment, "but rather had grown worse," is quietly dropped by Luke, who could not tolerate such a slur upon his own profession. The woman shares the belief of those about her that the touch of Jesus is remedial, not necessarily the consciously willed touch of His hand, but any kind of contact with Him, such as might be obtained by touching His robe. Note that all the conditions for a cure are present. There is the overmastering personality of Jesus, whose fame as a healer had spread far and wide. There is "expectant attention" raised to a high pitch of in-



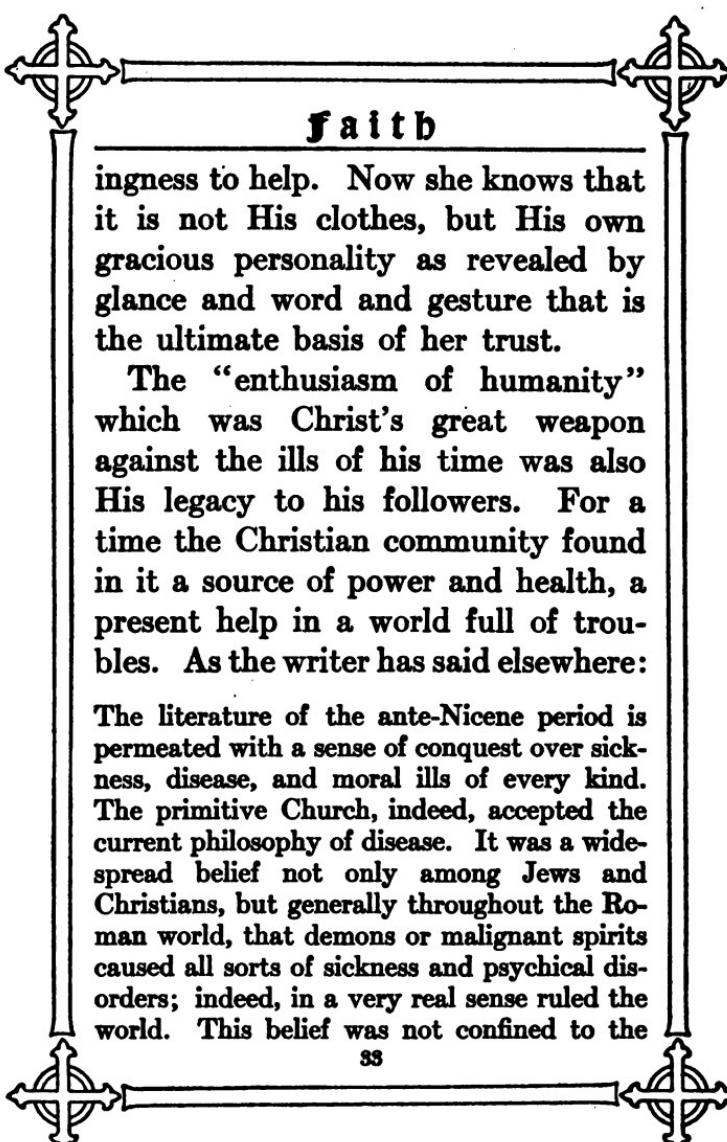
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tensity by the very fact that she and those with her are on the way to witness a manifestation of healing power far greater than any that would be needed in her case. There is strong faith in Jesus Himself, mingled with a superstitious belief that a kind of quasi-physical energy proceeds from His person and permeates His clothes. Carried onward by the rush of psychic excitement, she forces her way through the crowd and grasps the tassel of his garment. And then the physical change takes place—how, modern science does not know. She “knows in her body” that she is cured of her complaint. Now Jesus is conscious that the hand which plucks at His garment is not the hand of a mere curiosity-seeker, but of one in dire need. His spiritual sensitiveness, His powers of intuition,



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would suffice to warn Him of the silent appeal. He asks who it is that touched Him, and looks around to find the suppliant. She, in turn, feels herself in the presence of a superhuman power, and He who wields it now looks at her. Once more her native superstition suggests false ideas which awaken her terror. Afraid and trembling, she falls at the Master's feet and begs forgiveness for her boldness. The cure has already been wrought. He now confirms it and renders it permanent with a word of grace which must long have lingered in her memory. "Daughter, thy faith has saved thee. Depart in peace and be free from thy complaint." In other words, Jesus would have her understand that the true factors in the cure are Himself and her own faith in His power and will.

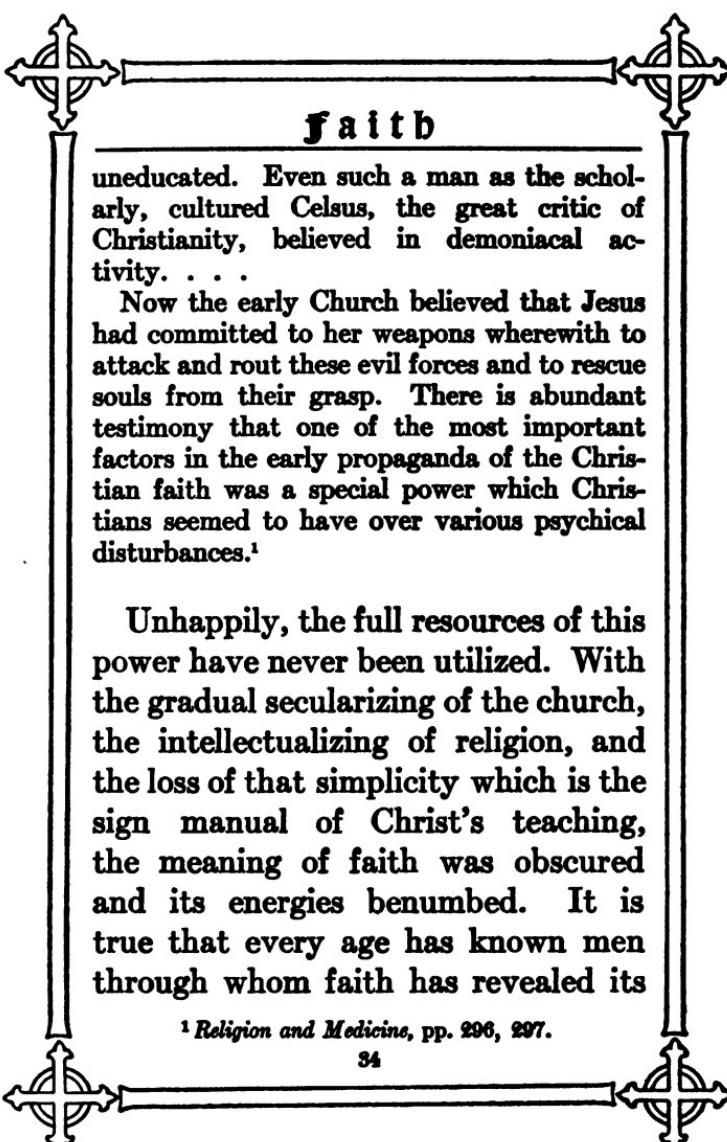


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ingness to help. Now she knows that it is not His clothes, but His own gracious personality as revealed by glance and word and gesture that is the ultimate basis of her trust.

The "enthusiasm of humanity" which was Christ's great weapon against the ills of his time was also His legacy to his followers. For a time the Christian community found in it a source of power and health, a present help in a world full of troubles. As the writer has said elsewhere:

The literature of the ante-Nicene period is permeated with a sense of conquest over sickness, disease, and moral ills of every kind. The primitive Church, indeed, accepted the current philosophy of disease. It was a widespread belief not only among Jews and Christians, but generally throughout the Roman world, that demons or malignant spirits caused all sorts of sickness and psychical disorders; indeed, in a very real sense ruled the world. This belief was not confined to the



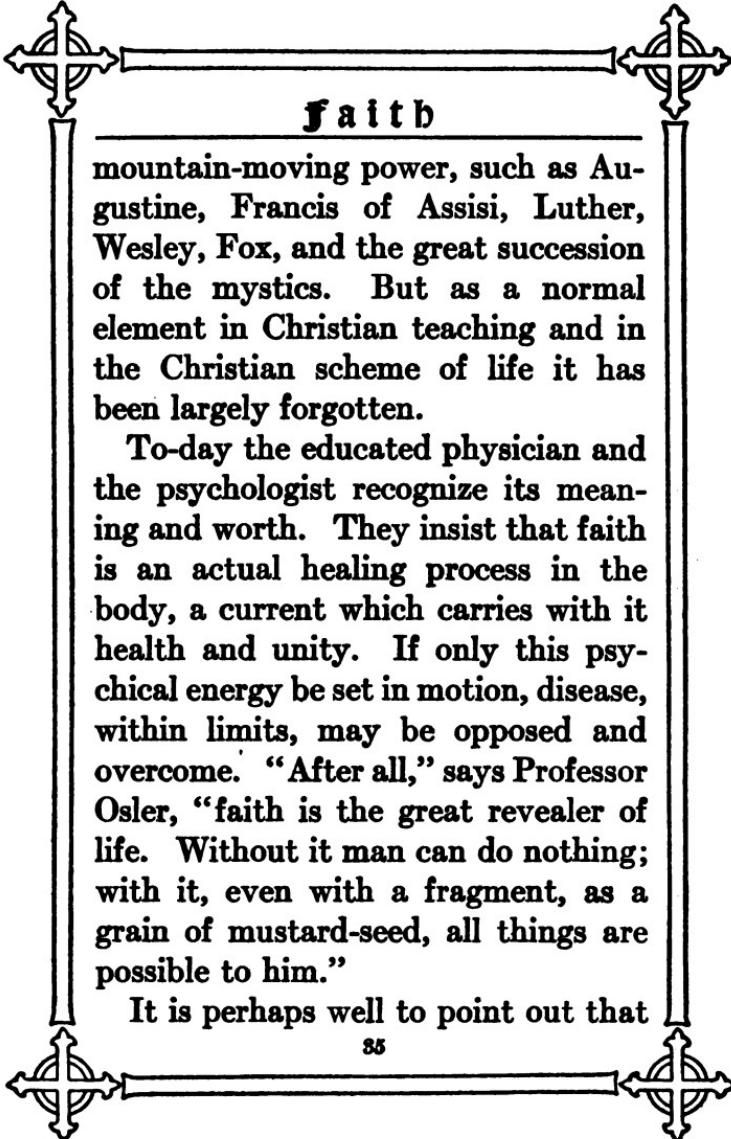
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uneducated. Even such a man as the scholarly, cultured Celsus, the great critic of Christianity, believed in demoniacal activity. . . .

Now the early Church believed that Jesus had committed to her weapons wherewith to attack and rout these evil forces and to rescue souls from their grasp. There is abundant testimony that one of the most important factors in the early propaganda of the Christian faith was a special power which Christians seemed to have over various psychical disturbances.¹

Unhappily, the full resources of this power have never been utilized. With the gradual secularizing of the church, the intellectualizing of religion, and the loss of that simplicity which is the sign manual of Christ's teaching, the meaning of faith was obscured and its energies benumbed. It is true that every age has known men through whom faith has revealed its

¹ *Religion and Medicine*, pp. 296, 297.

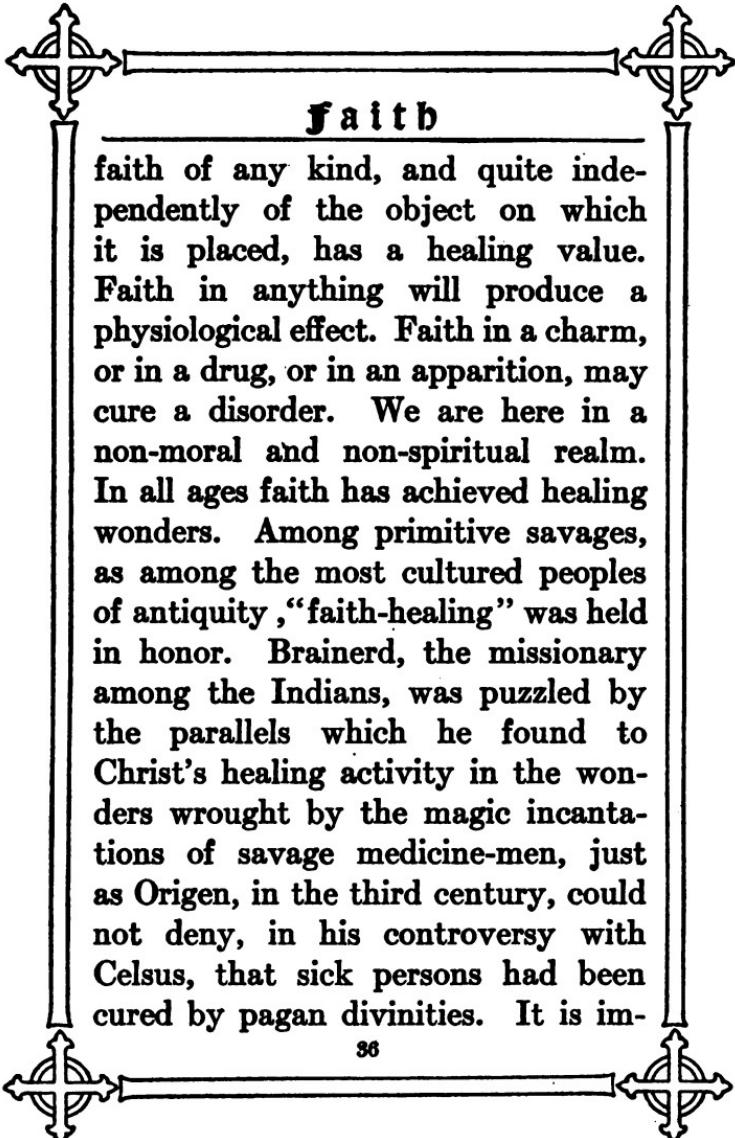


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mountain-moving power, such as Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Wesley, Fox, and the great succession of the mystics. But as a normal element in Christian teaching and in the Christian scheme of life it has been largely forgotten.

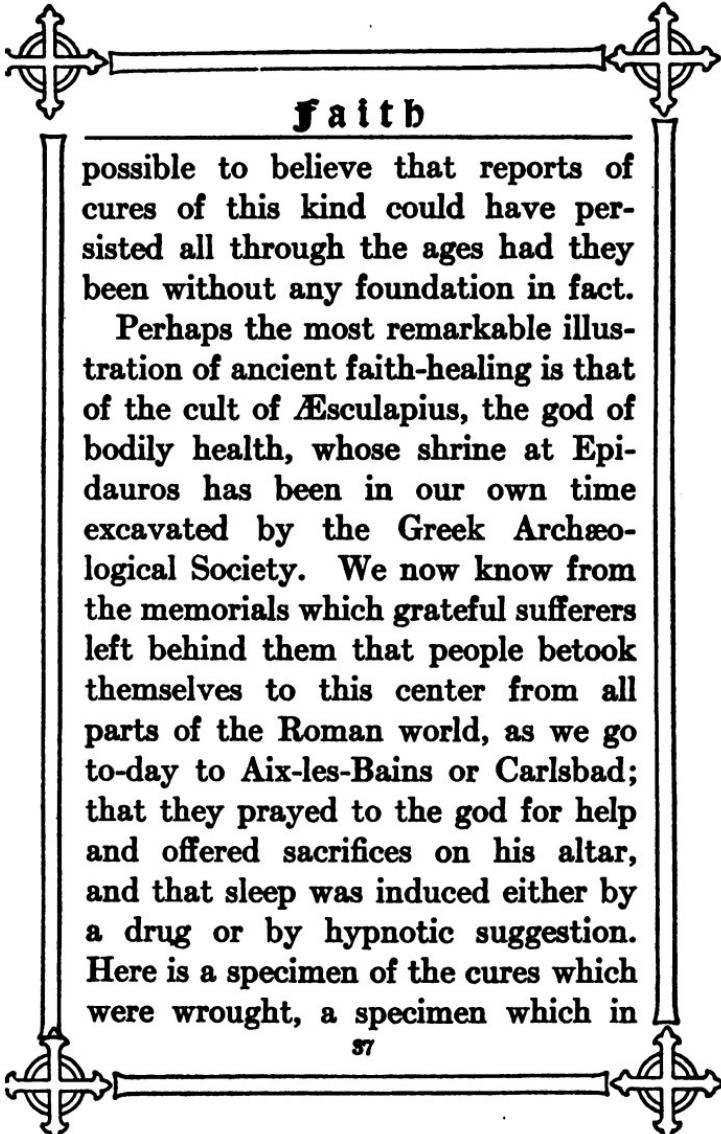
To-day the educated physician and the psychologist recognize its meaning and worth. They insist that faith is an actual healing process in the body, a current which carries with it health and unity. If only this psychical energy be set in motion, disease, within limits, may be opposed and overcome. "After all," says Professor Osler, "faith is the great revealer of life. Without it man can do nothing; with it, even with a fragment, as a grain of mustard-seed, all things are possible to him."

It is perhaps well to point out that



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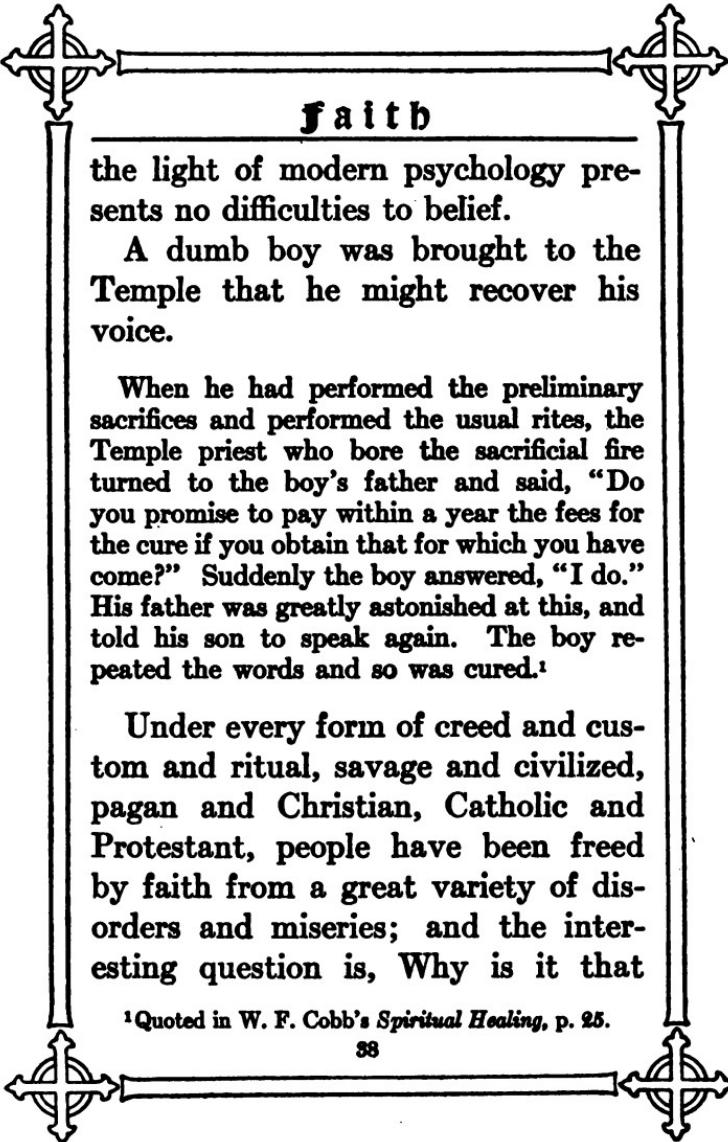
faith of any kind, and quite independently of the object on which it is placed, has a healing value. Faith in anything will produce a physiological effect. Faith in a charm, or in a drug, or in an apparition, may cure a disorder. We are here in a non-moral and non-spiritual realm. In all ages faith has achieved healing wonders. Among primitive savages, as among the most cultured peoples of antiquity, "faith-healing" was held in honor. Brainerd, the missionary among the Indians, was puzzled by the parallels which he found to Christ's healing activity in the wonders wrought by the magic incantations of savage medicine-men, just as Origen, in the third century, could not deny, in his controversy with Celsus, that sick persons had been cured by pagan divinities. It is im-



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possible to believe that reports of cures of this kind could have persisted all through the ages had they been without any foundation in fact.

Perhaps the most remarkable illustration of ancient faith-healing is that of the cult of *Æsculapius*, the god of bodily health, whose shrine at Epidaurus has been in our own time excavated by the Greek Archaeological Society. We now know from the memorials which grateful sufferers left behind them that people betook themselves to this center from all parts of the Roman world, as we go to-day to Aix-les-Bains or Carlsbad; that they prayed to the god for help and offered sacrifices on his altar, and that sleep was induced either by a drug or by hypnotic suggestion. Here is a specimen of the cures which were wrought, a specimen which in



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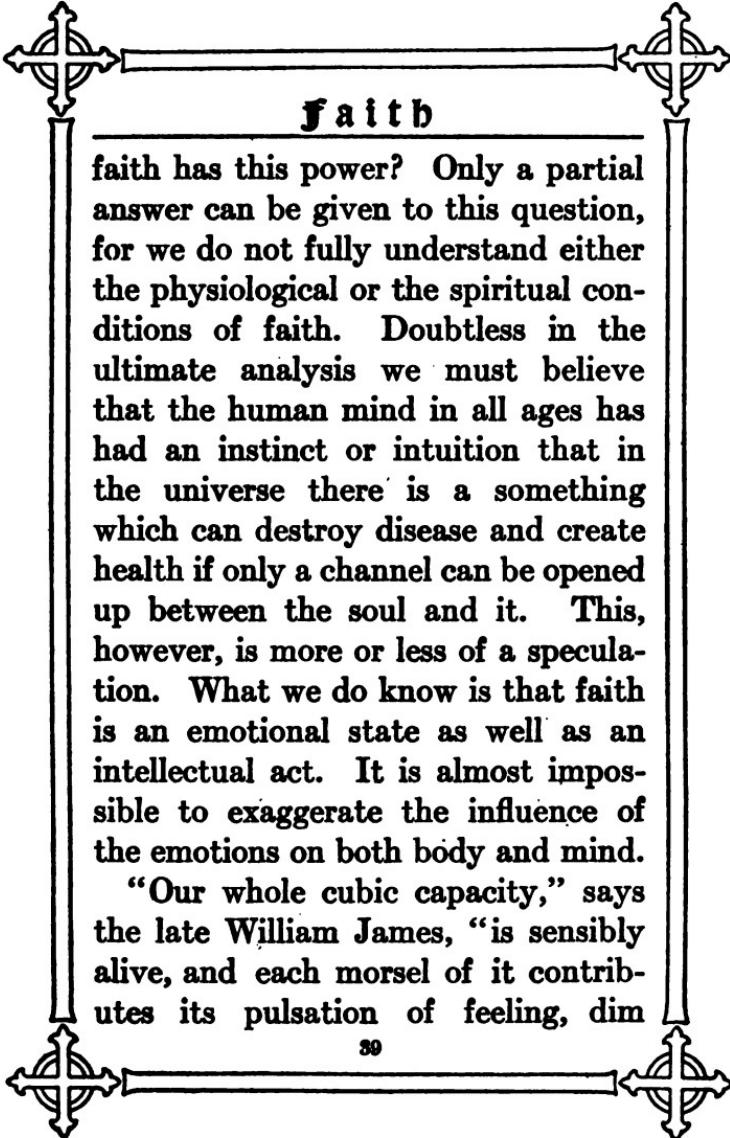
the light of modern psychology presents no difficulties to belief.

A dumb boy was brought to the Temple that he might recover his voice.

When he had performed the preliminary sacrifices and performed the usual rites, the Temple priest who bore the sacrificial fire turned to the boy's father and said, "Do you promise to pay within a year the fees for the cure if you obtain that for which you have come?" Suddenly the boy answered, "I do." His father was greatly astonished at this, and told his son to speak again. The boy repeated the words and so was cured.¹

Under every form of creed and custom and ritual, savage and civilized, pagan and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, people have been freed by faith from a great variety of disorders and miseries; and the interesting question is, Why is it that

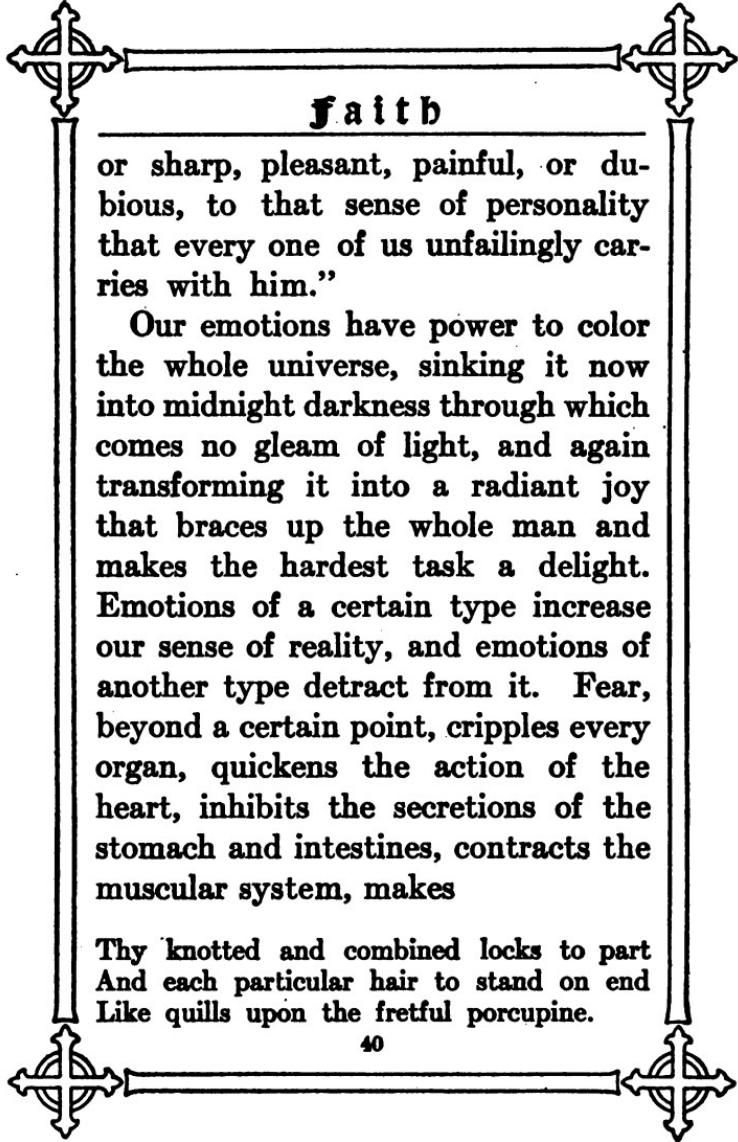
¹Quoted in W. F. Cobb's *Spiritual Healing*, p. 25.



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faith has this power? Only a partial answer can be given to this question, for we do not fully understand either the physiological or the spiritual conditions of faith. Doubtless in the ultimate analysis we must believe that the human mind in all ages has had an instinct or intuition that in the universe there is a something which can destroy disease and create health if only a channel can be opened up between the soul and it. This, however, is more or less of a speculation. What we do know is that faith is an emotional state as well as an intellectual act. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the influence of the emotions on both body and mind.

“Our whole cubic capacity,” says the late William James, “is sensibly alive, and each morsel of it contributes its pulsation of feeling, dim

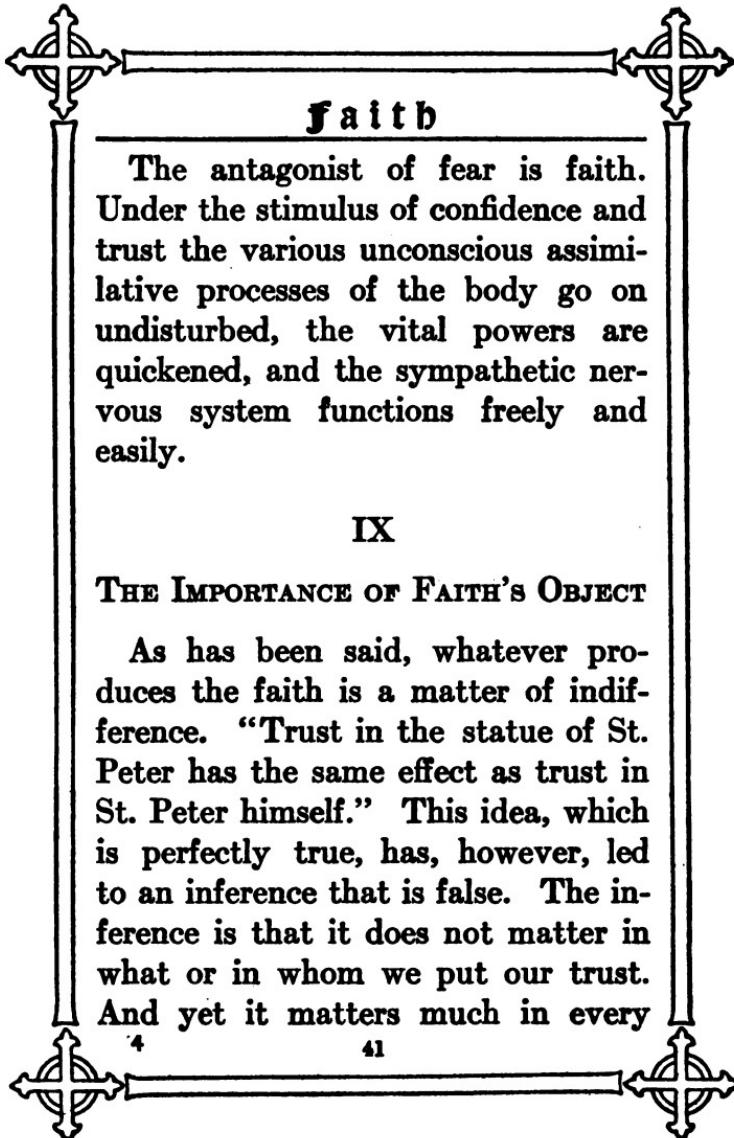


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or sharp, pleasant, painful, or dubious, to that sense of personality that every one of us unfailingly carries with him."

Our emotions have power to color the whole universe, sinking it now into midnight darkness through which comes no gleam of light, and again transforming it into a radiant joy that braces up the whole man and makes the hardest task a delight. Emotions of a certain type increase our sense of reality, and emotions of another type detract from it. Fear, beyond a certain point, cripples every organ, quickens the action of the heart, inhibits the secretions of the stomach and intestines, contracts the muscular system, makes

Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.



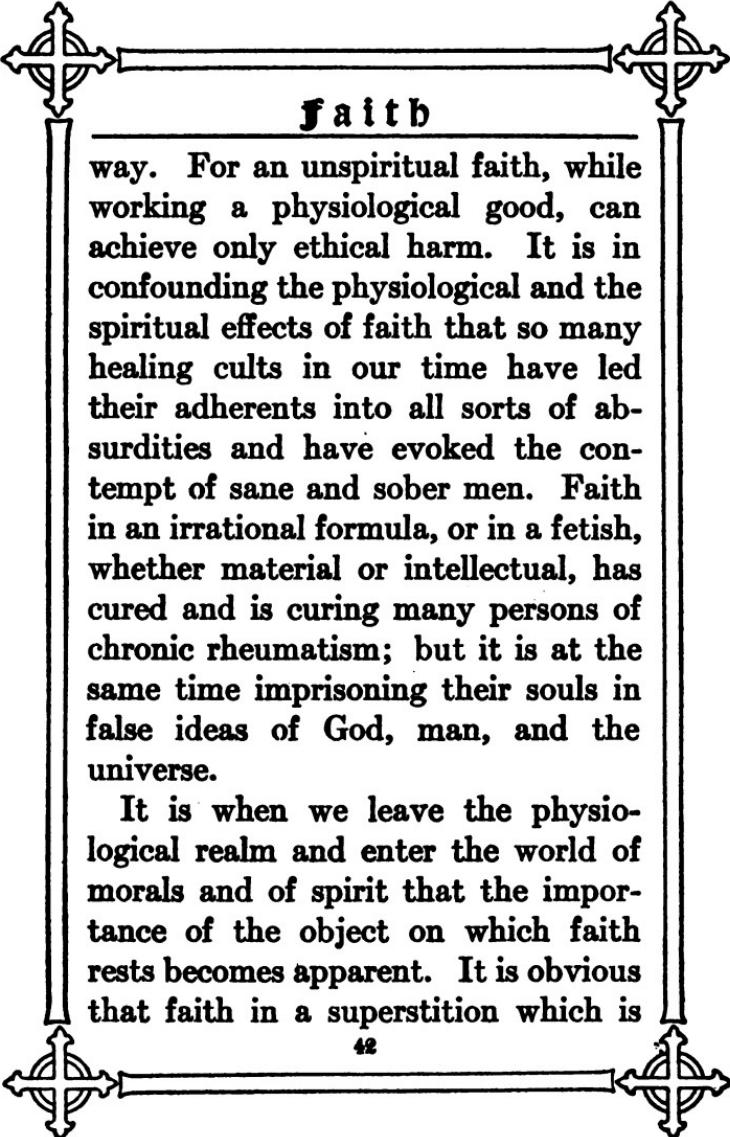
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The antagonist of fear is faith. Under the stimulus of confidence and trust the various unconscious assimilative processes of the body go on undisturbed, the vital powers are quickened, and the sympathetic nervous system functions freely and easily.

IX

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH'S OBJECT

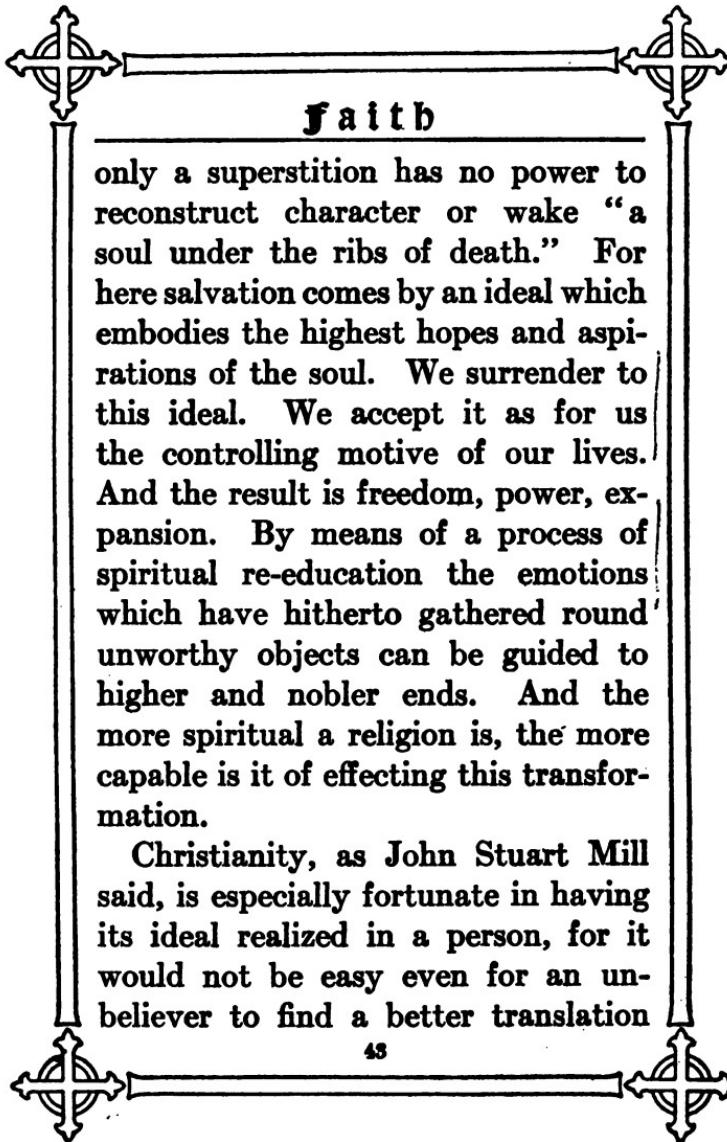
As has been said, whatever produces the faith is a matter of indifference. "Trust in the statue of St. Peter has the same effect as trust in St. Peter himself." This idea, which is perfectly true, has, however, led to an inference that is false. The inference is that it does not matter in what or in whom we put our trust. And yet it matters much in every



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way. For an unspiritual faith, while working a physiological good, can achieve only ethical harm. It is in confounding the physiological and the spiritual effects of faith that so many healing cults in our time have led their adherents into all sorts of absurdities and have evoked the contempt of sane and sober men. Faith in an irrational formula, or in a fetish, whether material or intellectual, has cured and is curing many persons of chronic rheumatism; but it is at the same time imprisoning their souls in false ideas of God, man, and the universe.

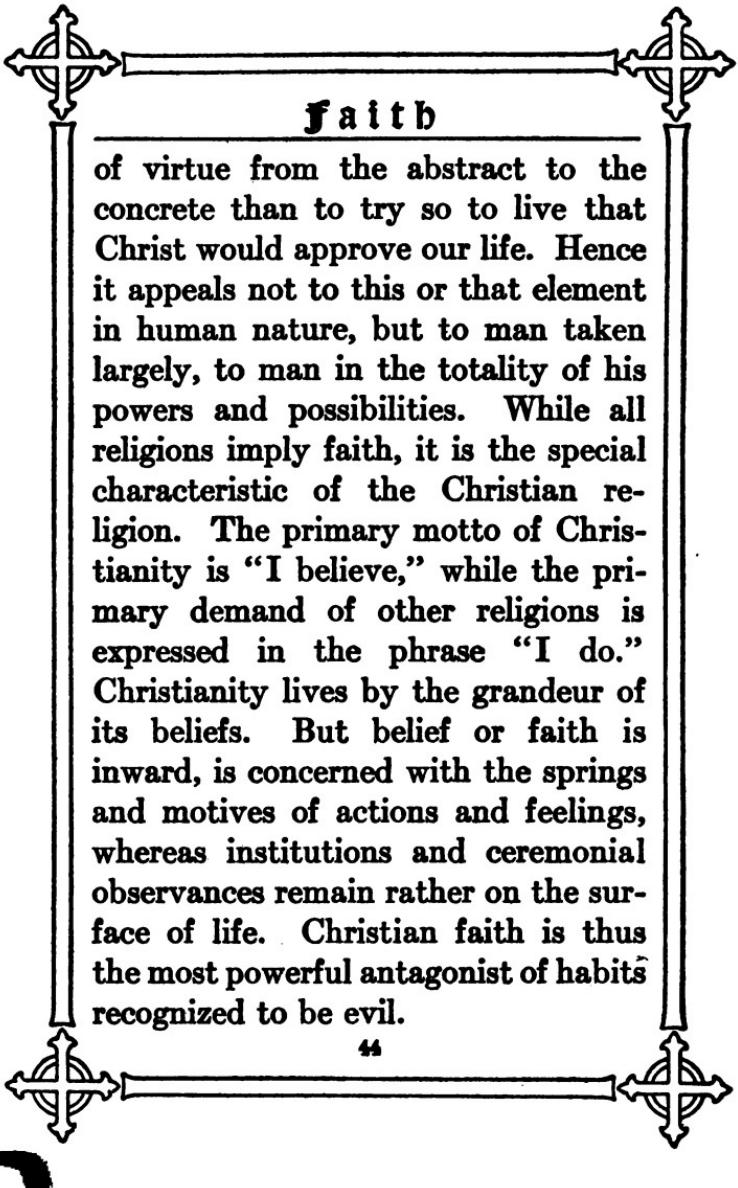
It is when we leave the physiological realm and enter the world of morals and of spirit that the importance of the object on which faith rests becomes apparent. It is obvious that faith in a superstition which is



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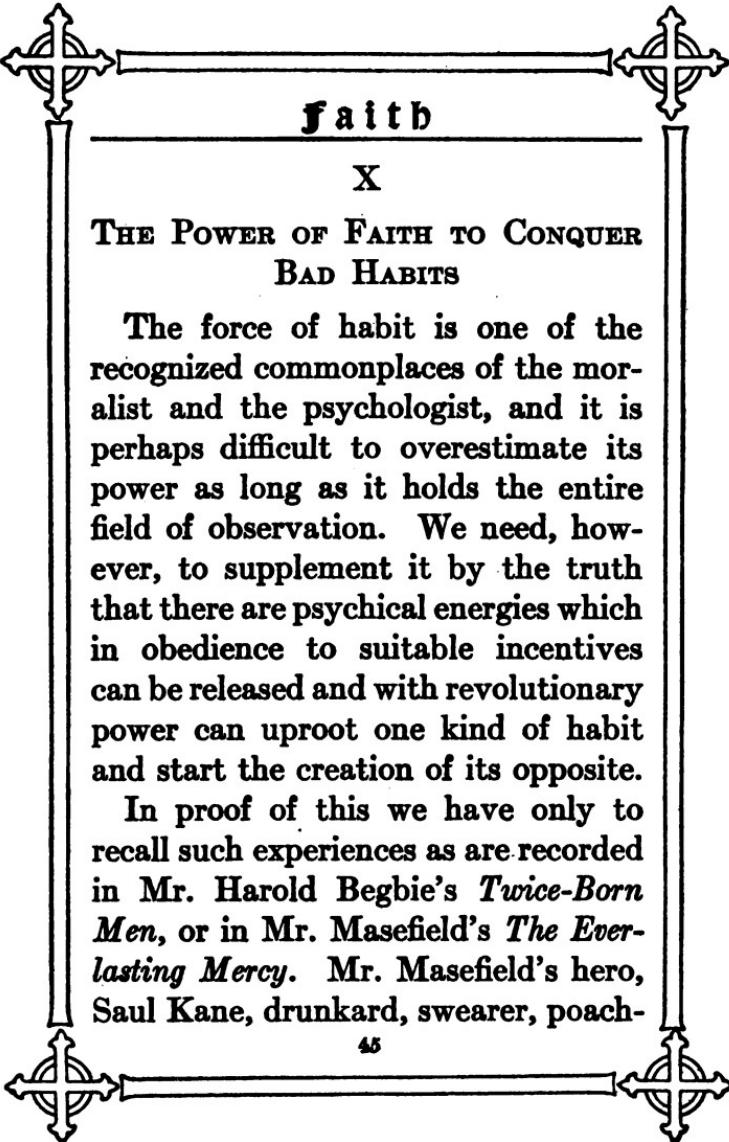
only a superstition has no power to reconstruct character or wake "a soul under the ribs of death." For here salvation comes by an ideal which embodies the highest hopes and aspirations of the soul. We surrender to this ideal. We accept it as for us the controlling motive of our lives. And the result is freedom, power, expansion. By means of a process of spiritual re-education the emotions which have hitherto gathered round unworthy objects can be guided to higher and nobler ends. And the more spiritual a religion is, the more capable is it of effecting this transformation.

Christianity, as John Stuart Mill said, is especially fortunate in having its ideal realized in a person, for it would not be easy even for an unbeliever to find a better translation



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of virtue from the abstract to the concrete than to try so to live that Christ would approve our life. Hence it appeals not to this or that element in human nature, but to man taken largely, to man in the totality of his powers and possibilities. While all religions imply faith, it is the special characteristic of the Christian religion. The primary motto of Christianity is "I believe," while the primary demand of other religions is expressed in the phrase "I do." Christianity lives by the grandeur of its beliefs. But belief or faith is inward, is concerned with the springs and motives of actions and feelings, whereas institutions and ceremonial observances remain rather on the surface of life. Christian faith is thus the most powerful antagonist of habits recognized to be evil.



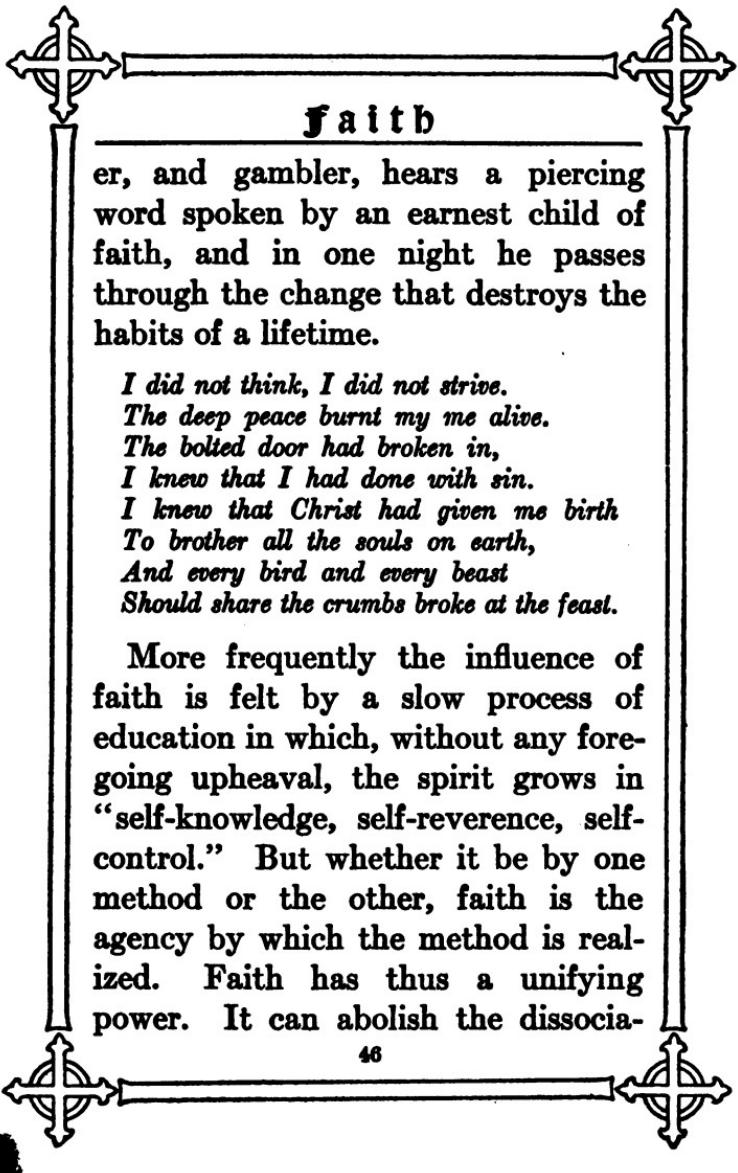
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X

THE POWER OF FAITH TO CONQUER BAD HABITS

The force of habit is one of the recognized commonplaces of the moralist and the psychologist, and it is perhaps difficult to overestimate its power as long as it holds the entire field of observation. We need, however, to supplement it by the truth that there are psychical energies which in obedience to suitable incentives can be released and with revolutionary power can uproot one kind of habit and start the creation of its opposite.

In proof of this we have only to recall such experiences as are recorded in Mr. Harold Begbie's *Twice-Born Men*, or in Mr. Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy*. Mr. Masefield's hero, Saul Kane, drunkard, swearer, poach-

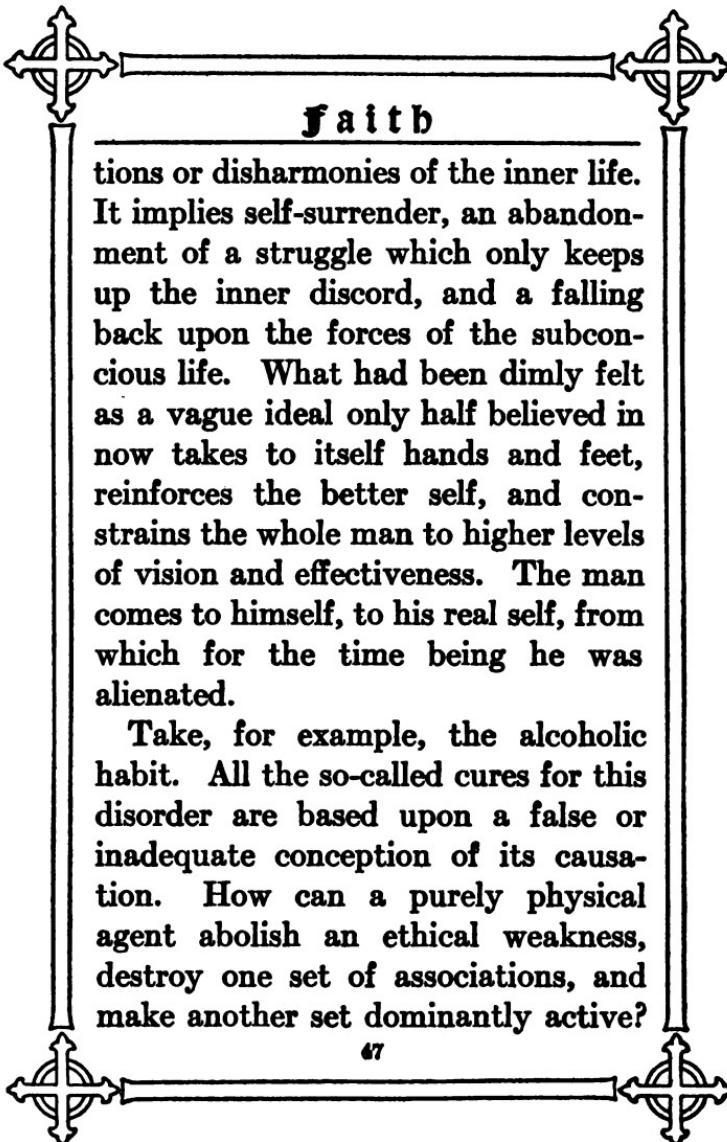


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er, and gambler, hears a piercing word spoken by an earnest child of faith, and in one night he passes through the change that destroys the habits of a lifetime.

*I did not think, I did not strive.
The deep peace burnt my me alive.
The bolted door had broken in,
I knew that I had done with sin.
I knew that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls on earth,
And every bird and every beast
Should share the crumbs broke at the feast.*

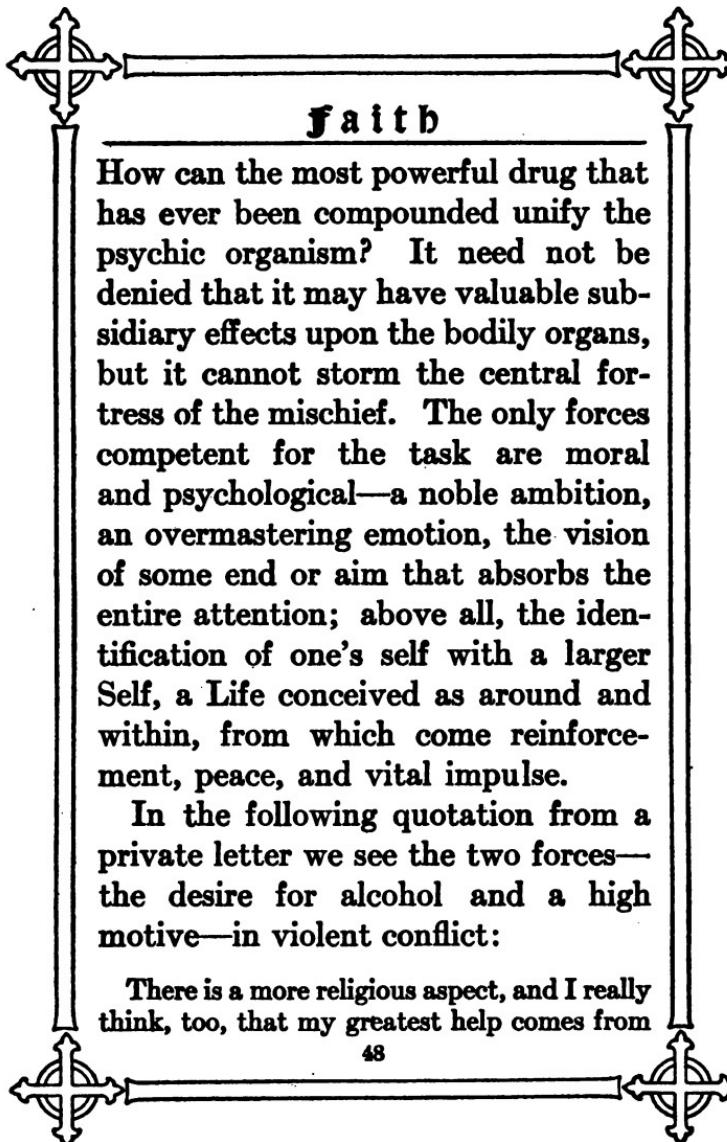
More frequently the influence of faith is felt by a slow process of education in which, without any foregoing upheaval, the spirit grows in “self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control.” But whether it be by one method or the other, faith is the agency by which the method is realized. Faith has thus a unifying power. It can abolish the dissocia-



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tions or disharmonies of the inner life. It implies self-surrender, an abandonment of a struggle which only keeps up the inner discord, and a falling back upon the forces of the subconscious life. What had been dimly felt as a vague ideal only half believed in now takes to itself hands and feet, reinforces the better self, and constrains the whole man to higher levels of vision and effectiveness. The man comes to himself, to his real self, from which for the time being he was alienated.

Take, for example, the alcoholic habit. All the so-called cures for this disorder are based upon a false or inadequate conception of its causation. How can a purely physical agent abolish an ethical weakness, destroy one set of associations, and make another set dominantly active?



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How can the most powerful drug that has ever been compounded unify the psychic organism? It need not be denied that it may have valuable subsidiary effects upon the bodily organs, but it cannot storm the central fortress of the mischief. The only forces competent for the task are moral and psychological—a noble ambition, an overmastering emotion, the vision of some end or aim that absorbs the entire attention; above all, the identification of one's self with a larger Self, a Life conceived as around and within, from which come reinforcement, peace, and vital impulse.

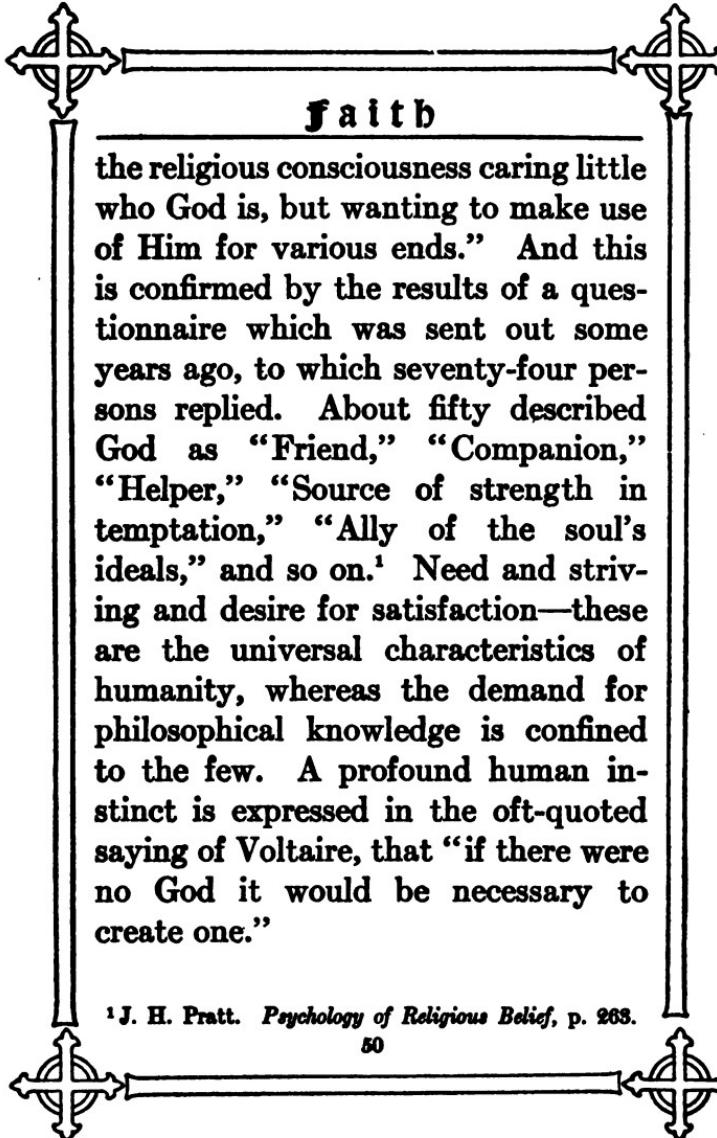
In the following quotation from a private letter we see the two forces—the desire for alcohol and a high motive—in violent conflict:

There is a more religious aspect, and I really think, too, that my greatest help comes from

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this source. There were only two days in the last three weeks when I had any temptation [to take a drink]. It seemed to me then that all good had departed out of me. As I was walking along the street invisible cords seemed to be dragging me into bar-rooms as I passed, and something kept telling me that it was all of no use and to go in and get a drink. Still there was a faint glimmering of common sense left, because I remembered something I had read in Prentice Mulford's books—that when we have exhausted all our resources in any direction until we are almost ready to give up, we may still conquer if we literally throw ourselves back on God and let the Supreme Power fight the battle for us. On this occasion I did this, and pretty soon all sense of discord left me. The temptations lost their power, and I was at peace. I have not been tempted since. I may be again, but I do not think the temptations will be so strong next time, and I will be stronger myself, and God will be just as ready to help me next time. So I am safe.

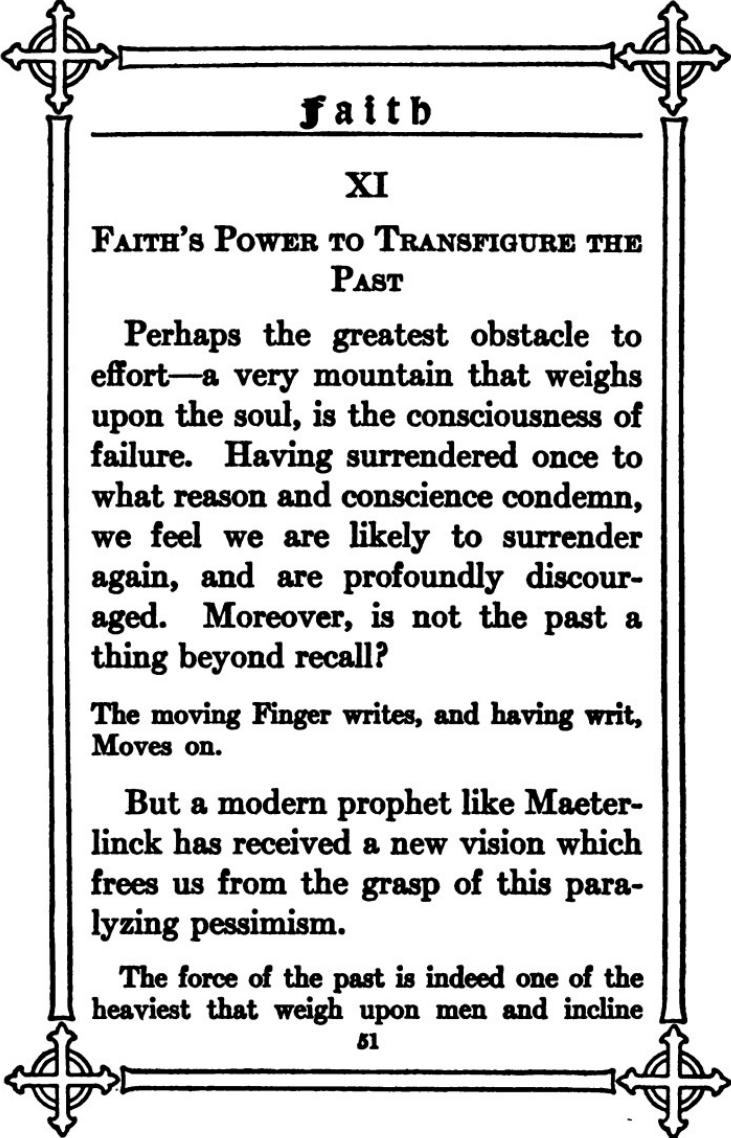
Experiences of this kind remind us of Professor Leuba's remark that "God is used rather than understood;



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the religious consciousness caring little who God is, but wanting to make use of Him for various ends.” And this is confirmed by the results of a questionnaire which was sent out some years ago, to which seventy-four persons replied. About fifty described God as “Friend,” “Companion,” “Helper,” “Source of strength in temptation,” “Ally of the soul’s ideals,” and so on.¹ Need and striving and desire for satisfaction—these are the universal characteristics of humanity, whereas the demand for philosophical knowledge is confined to the few. A profound human instinct is expressed in the oft-quoted saying of Voltaire, that “if there were no God it would be necessary to create one.”

¹ J. H. Pratt. *Psychology of Religious Belief*, p. 263.



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XI

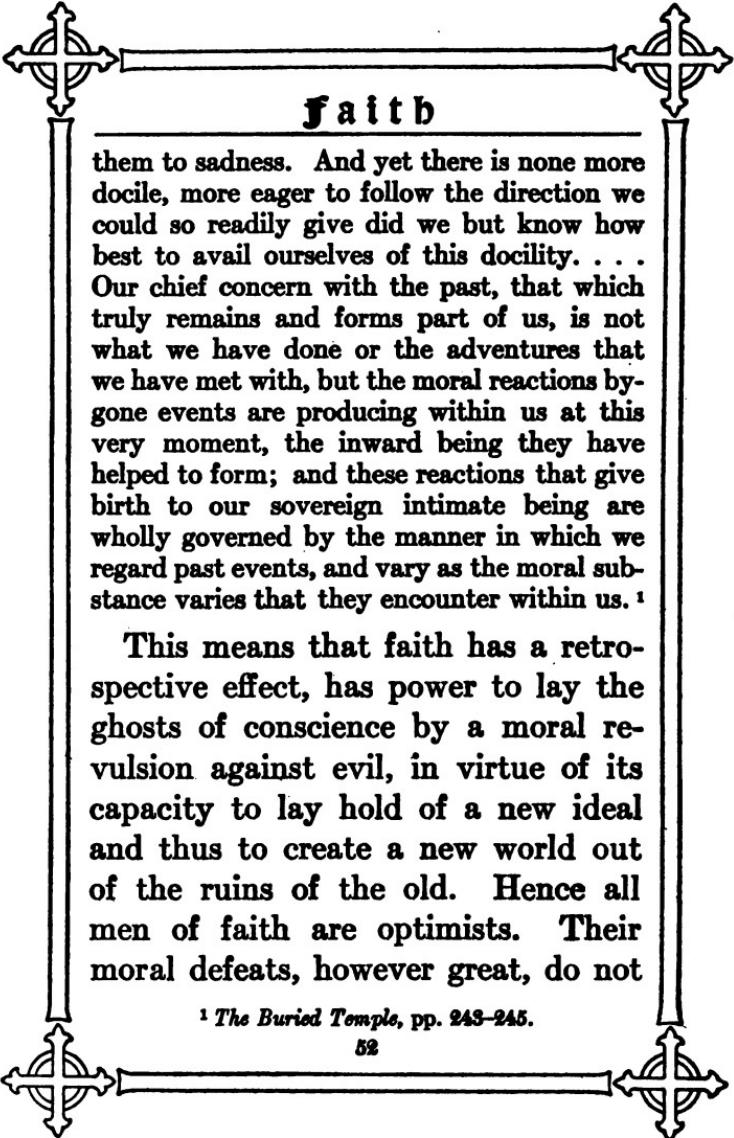
FAITH'S POWER TO TRANFIGURE THE PAST

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to effort—a very mountain that weighs upon the soul, is the consciousness of failure. Having surrendered once to what reason and conscience condemn, we feel we are likely to surrender again, and are profoundly discouraged. Moreover, is not the past a thing beyond recall?

The moving Finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on.

But a modern prophet like Maeterlinck has received a new vision which frees us from the grasp of this paralyzing pessimism.

The force of the past is indeed one of the heaviest that weigh upon men and incline

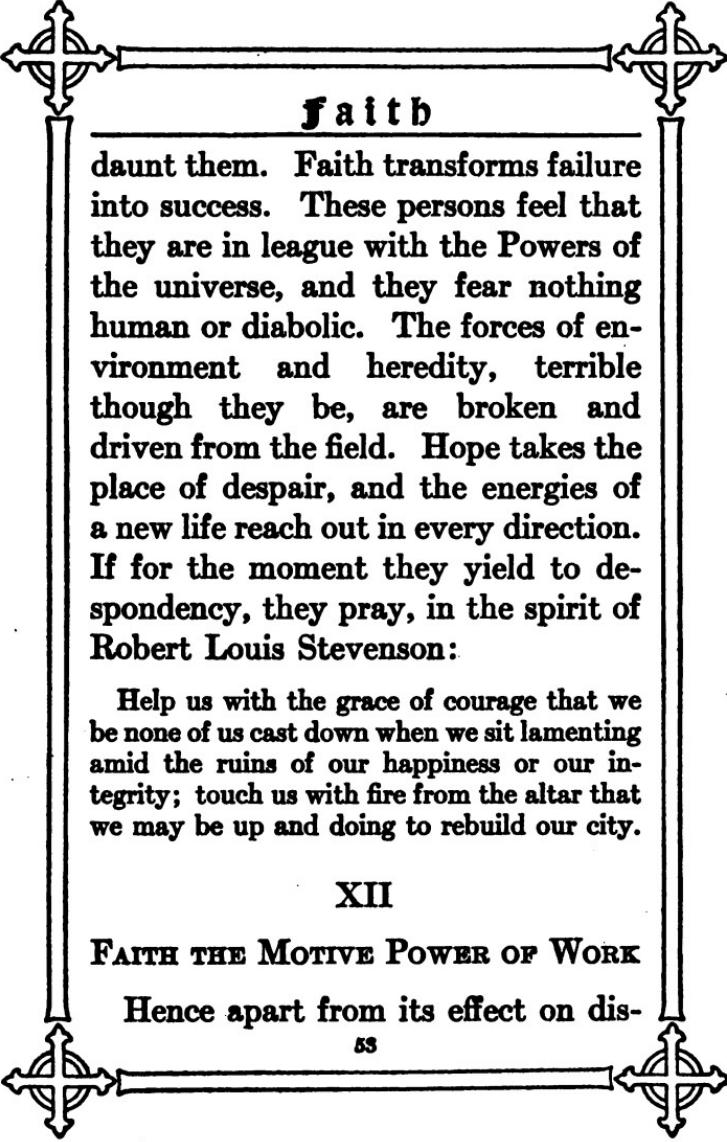


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them to sadness. And yet there is none more docile, more eager to follow the direction we could so readily give did we but know how best to avail ourselves of this docility. . . . Our chief concern with the past, that which truly remains and forms part of us, is not what we have done or the adventures that we have met with, but the moral reactions by-gone events are producing within us at this very moment, the inward being they have helped to form; and these reactions that give birth to our sovereign intimate being are wholly governed by the manner in which we regard past events, and vary as the moral substance varies that they encounter within us.¹

This means that faith has a retrospective effect, has power to lay the ghosts of conscience by a moral revulsion against evil, in virtue of its capacity to lay hold of a new ideal and thus to create a new world out of the ruins of the old. Hence all men of faith are optimists. Their moral defeats, however great, do not

¹ *The Buried Temple*, pp. 243-245.



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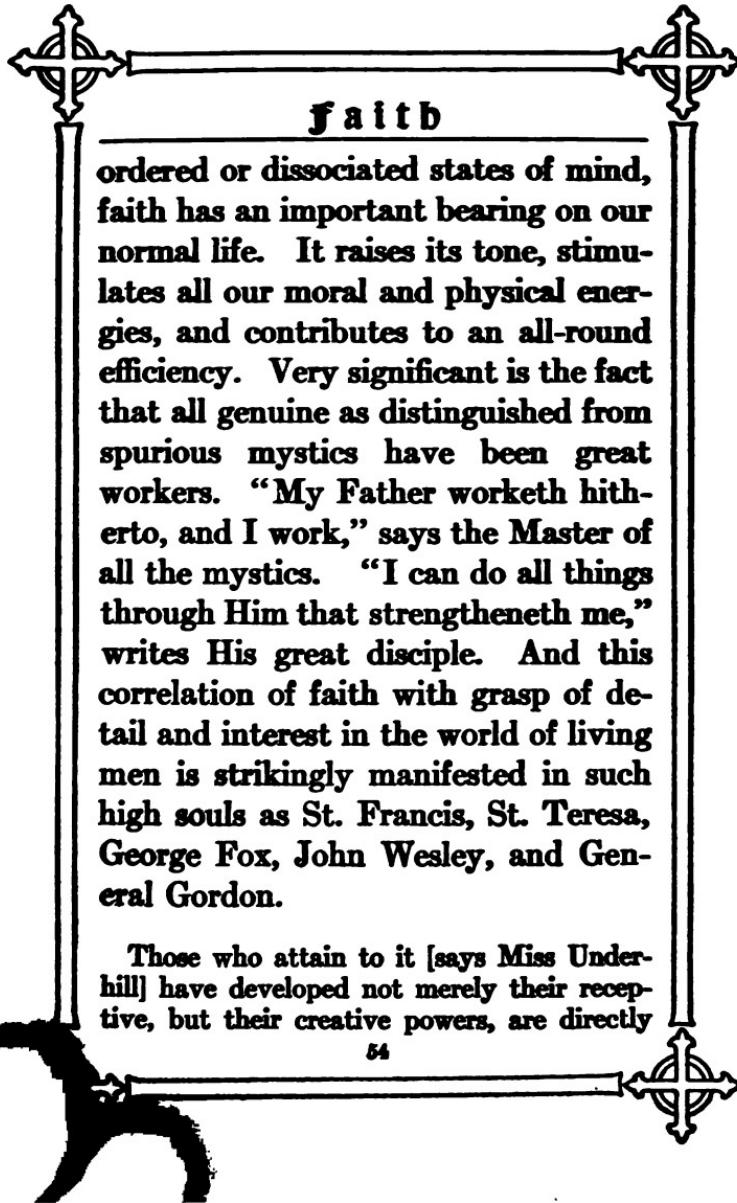
daunt them. Faith transforms failure into success. These persons feel that they are in league with the Powers of the universe, and they fear nothing human or diabolic. The forces of environment and heredity, terrible though they be, are broken and driven from the field. Hope takes the place of despair, and the energies of a new life reach out in every direction. If for the moment they yield to despondency, they pray, in the spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson:

Help us with the grace of courage that we
be none of us cast down when we sit lamenting
amid the ruins of our happiness or our integrity;
touch us with fire from the altar that
we may be up and doing to rebuild our city.

XII

FAITH THE MOTIVE POWER OF WORK

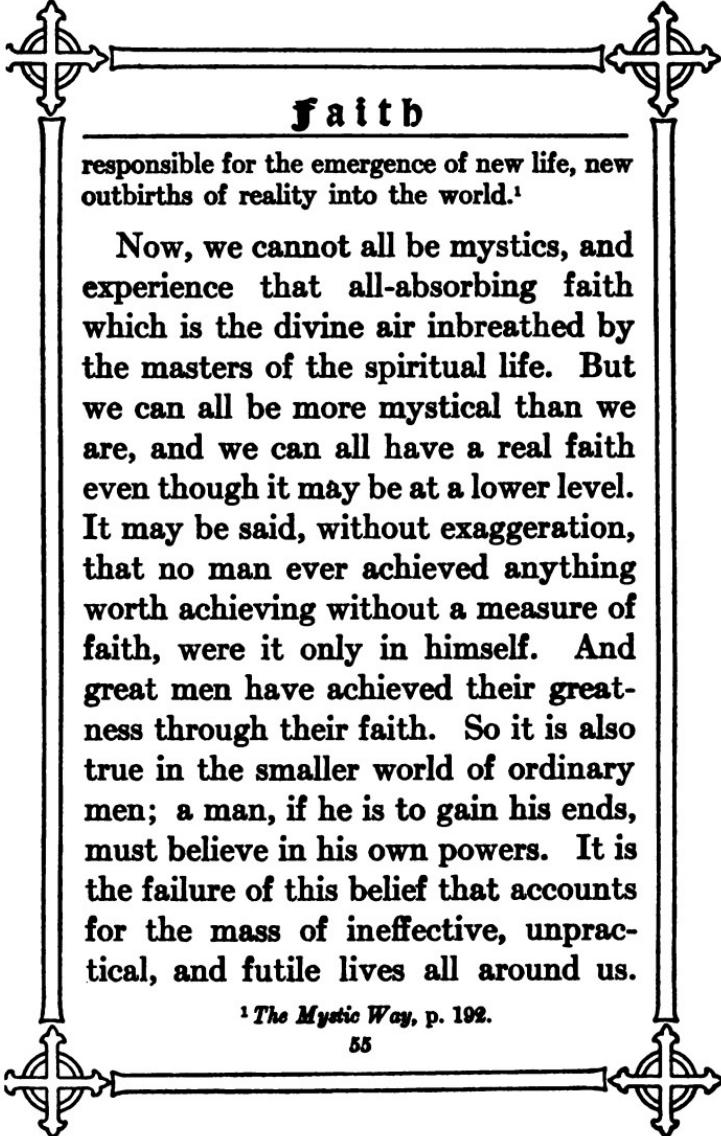
Hence apart from its effect on dis-



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ordered or dissociated states of mind, faith has an important bearing on our normal life. It raises its tone, stimulates all our moral and physical energies, and contributes to an all-round efficiency. Very significant is the fact that all genuine as distinguished from spurious mystics have been great workers. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," says the Master of all the mystics. "I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me," writes His great disciple. And this correlation of faith with grasp of detail and interest in the world of living men is strikingly manifested in such high souls as St. Francis, St. Teresa, George Fox, John Wesley, and General Gordon.

Those who attain to it [says Miss Underhill] have developed not merely their receptive, but their creative powers, are directly

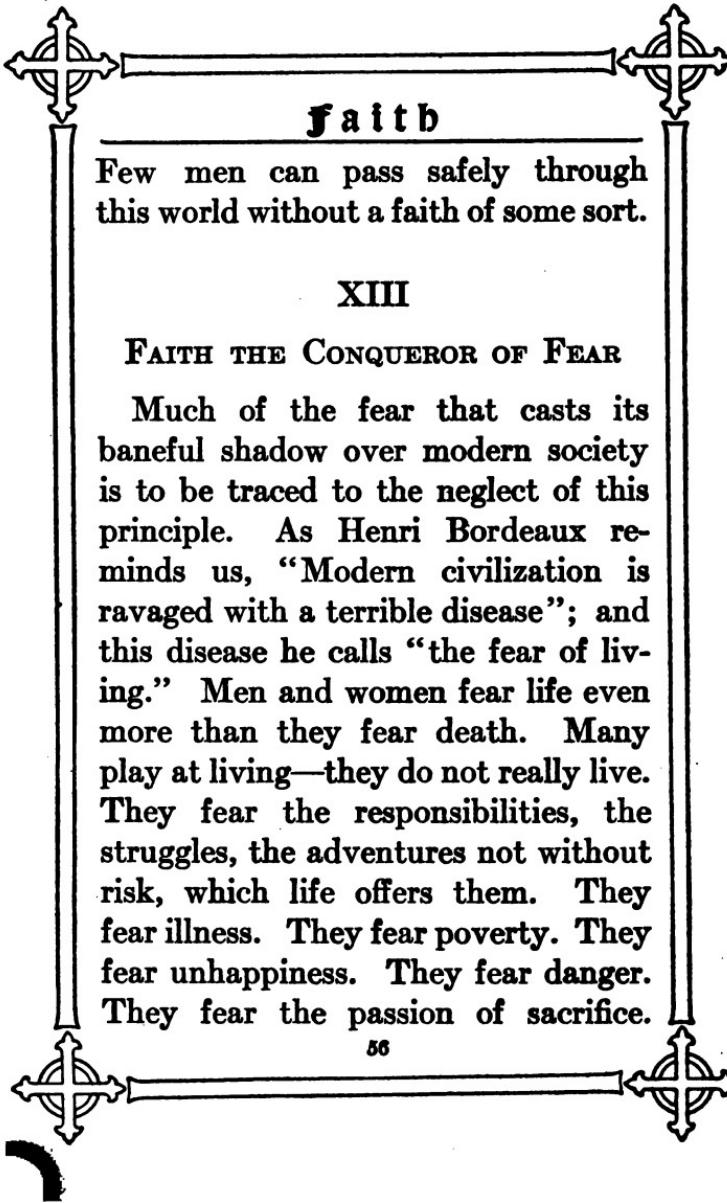


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responsible for the emergence of new life, new outbirths of reality into the world.¹

Now, we cannot all be mystics, and experience that all-absorbing faith which is the divine air inbreathed by the masters of the spiritual life. But we can all be more mystical than we are, and we can all have a real faith even though it may be at a lower level. It may be said, without exaggeration, that no man ever achieved anything worth achieving without a measure of faith, were it only in himself. And great men have achieved their greatness through their faith. So it is also true in the smaller world of ordinary men; a man, if he is to gain his ends, must believe in his own powers. It is the failure of this belief that accounts for the mass of ineffective, unpractical, and futile lives all around us.

¹ *The Mystic Way*, p. 192.



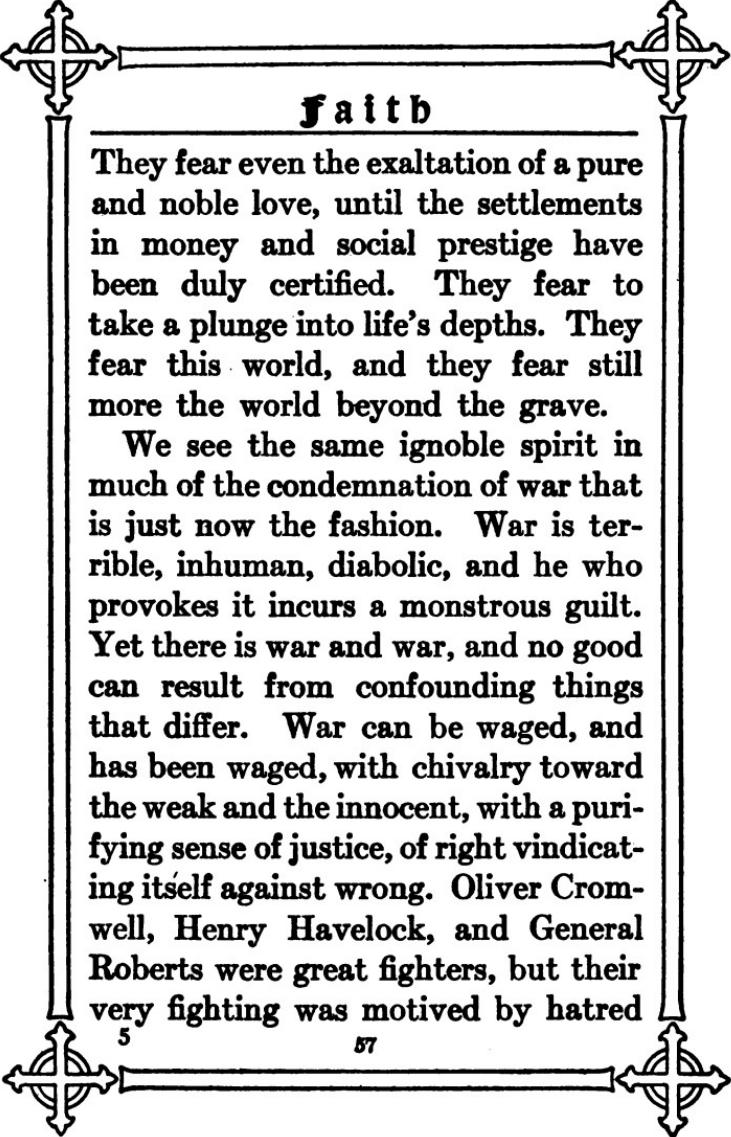
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Few men can pass safely through this world without a faith of some sort.

XIII

FAITH THE CONQUEROR OF FEAR

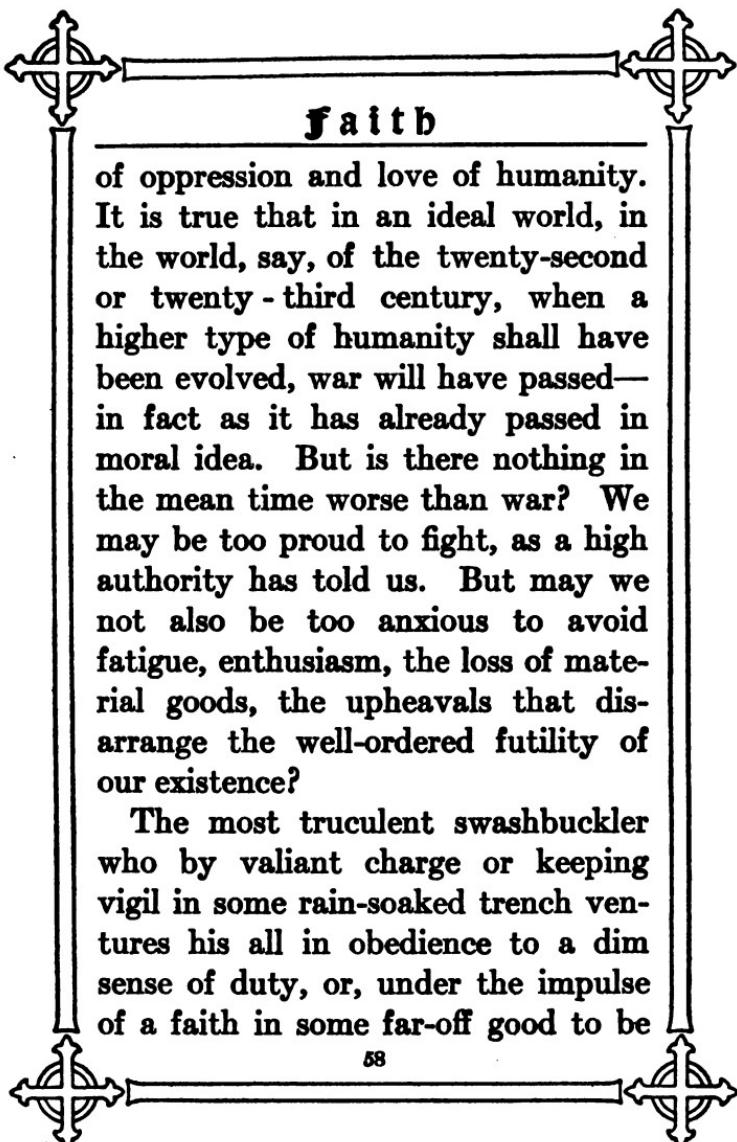
Much of the fear that casts its baneful shadow over modern society is to be traced to the neglect of this principle. As Henri Bordeaux reminds us, "Modern civilization is ravaged with a terrible disease"; and this disease he calls "the fear of living." Men and women fear life even more than they fear death. Many play at living—they do not really live. They fear the responsibilities, the struggles, the adventures not without risk, which life offers them. They fear illness. They fear poverty. They fear unhappiness. They fear danger. They fear the passion of sacrifice.



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They fear even the exaltation of a pure and noble love, until the settlements in money and social prestige have been duly certified. They fear to take a plunge into life's depths. They fear this world, and they fear still more the world beyond the grave.

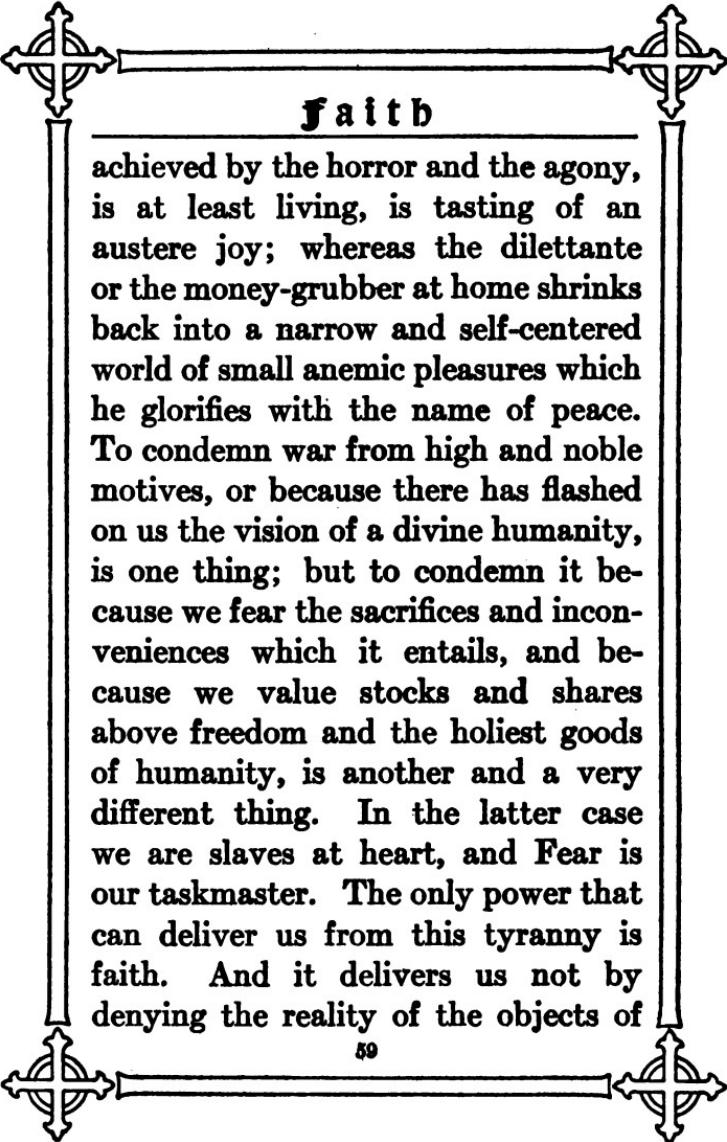
We see the same ignoble spirit in much of the condemnation of war that is just now the fashion. War is terrible, inhuman, diabolic, and he who provokes it incurs a monstrous guilt. Yet there is war and war, and no good can result from confounding things that differ. War can be waged, and has been waged, with chivalry toward the weak and the innocent, with a purifying sense of justice, of right vindicating itself against wrong. Oliver Cromwell, Henry Havelock, and General Roberts were great fighters, but their very fighting was motived by hatred



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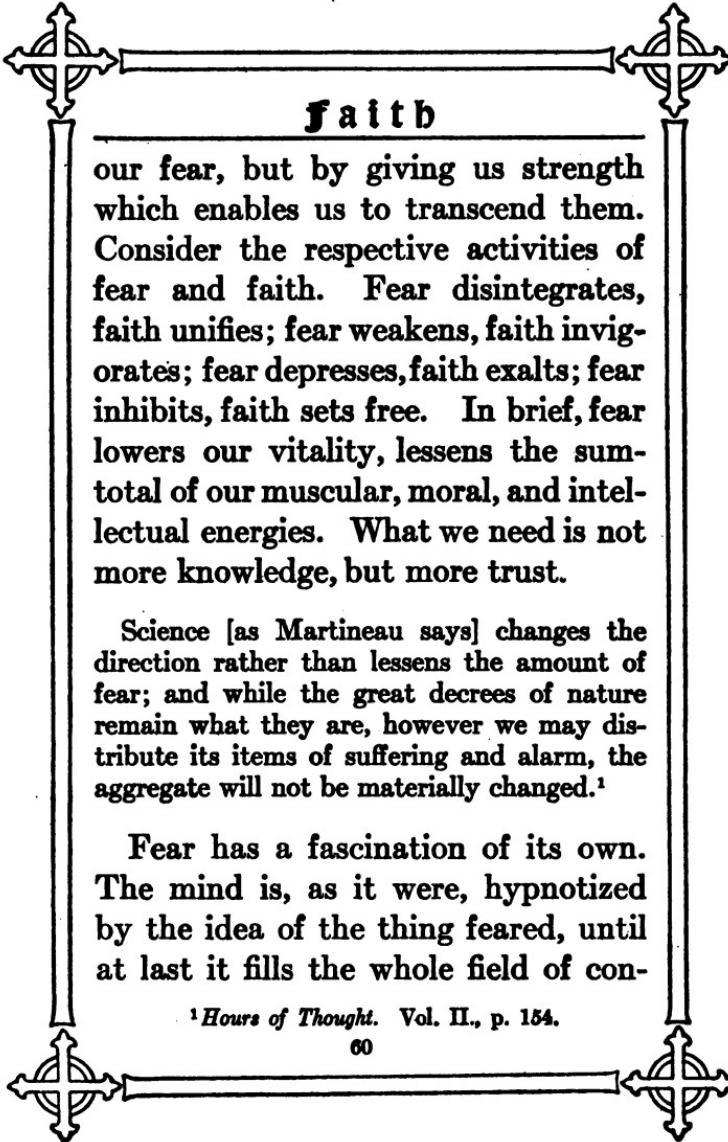
of oppression and love of humanity. It is true that in an ideal world, in the world, say, of the twenty-second or twenty-third century, when a higher type of humanity shall have been evolved, war will have passed—in fact as it has already passed in moral idea. But is there nothing in the mean time worse than war? We may be too proud to fight, as a high authority has told us. But may we not also be too anxious to avoid fatigue, enthusiasm, the loss of material goods, the upheavals that disarrange the well-ordered futility of our existence?

The most truculent swashbuckler who by valiant charge or keeping vigil in some rain-soaked trench ventures his all in obedience to a dim sense of duty, or, under the impulse of a faith in some far-off good to be



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achieved by the horror and the agony, is at least living, is tasting of an austere joy; whereas the dilettante or the money-grubber at home shrinks back into a narrow and self-centered world of small anemic pleasures which he glorifies with the name of peace. To condemn war from high and noble motives, or because there has flashed on us the vision of a divine humanity, is one thing; but to condemn it because we fear the sacrifices and inconveniences which it entails, and because we value stocks and shares above freedom and the holiest goods of humanity, is another and a very different thing. In the latter case we are slaves at heart, and Fear is our taskmaster. The only power that can deliver us from this tyranny is faith. And it delivers us not by denying the reality of the objects of



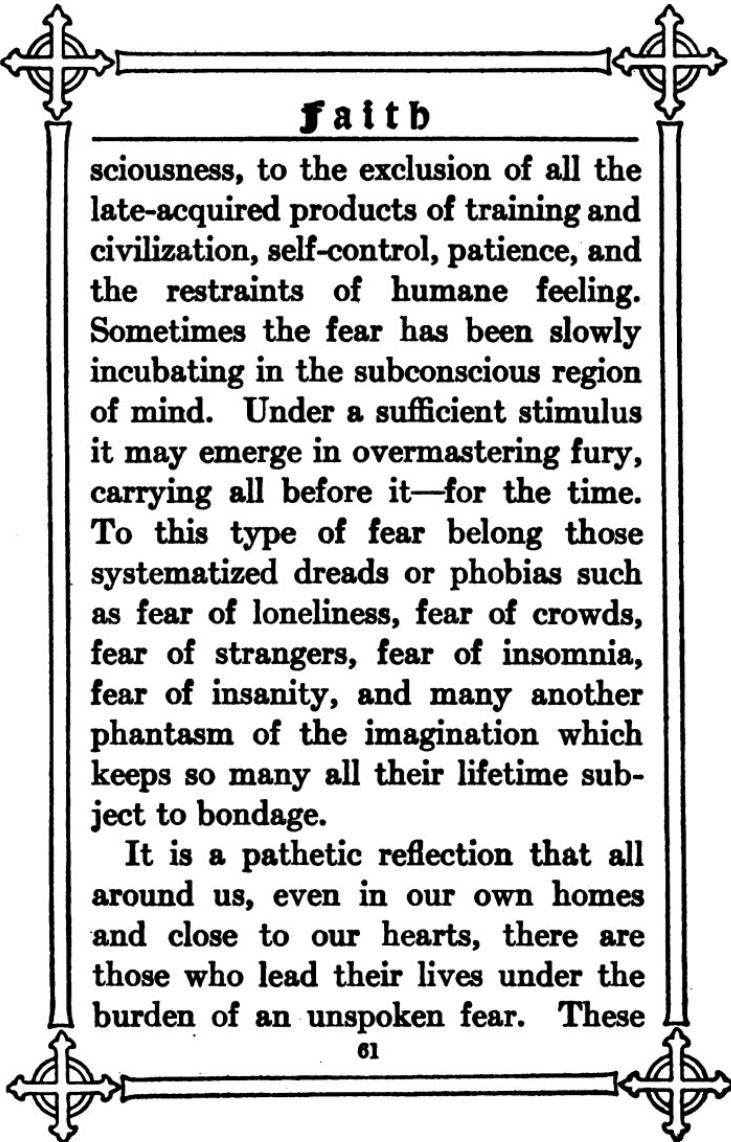
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our fear, but by giving us strength which enables us to transcend them. Consider the respective activities of fear and faith. Fear disintegrates, faith unifies; fear weakens, faith invigorates; fear depresses, faith exalts; fear inhibits, faith sets free. In brief, fear lowers our vitality, lessens the sum-total of our muscular, moral, and intellectual energies. What we need is not more knowledge, but more trust.

Science [as Martineau says] changes the direction rather than lessens the amount of fear; and while the great decrees of nature remain what they are, however we may distribute its items of suffering and alarm, the aggregate will not be materially changed.¹

Fear has a fascination of its own. The mind is, as it were, hypnotized by the idea of the thing feared, until at last it fills the whole field of con-

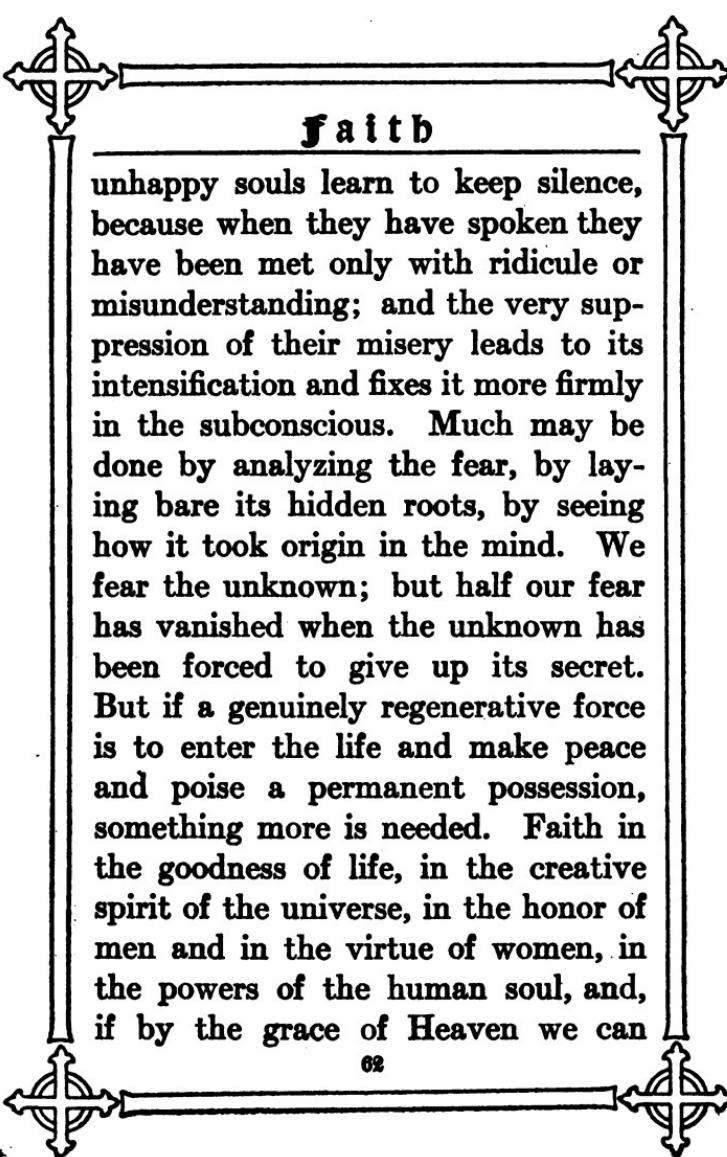
¹ *Hours of Thought.* Vol. II., p. 154.



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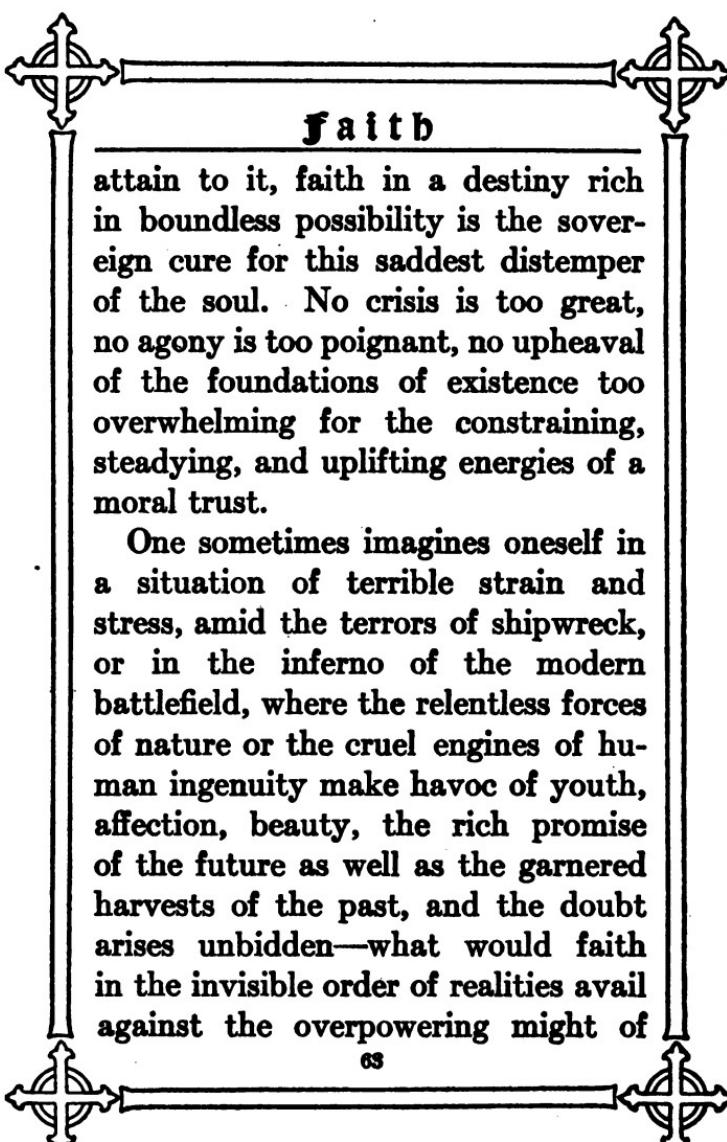
sciousness, to the exclusion of all the late-acquired products of training and civilization, self-control, patience, and the restraints of humane feeling. Sometimes the fear has been slowly incubating in the subconscious region of mind. Under a sufficient stimulus it may emerge in overmastering fury, carrying all before it—for the time. To this type of fear belong those systematized dreads or phobias such as fear of loneliness, fear of crowds, fear of strangers, fear of insomnia, fear of insanity, and many another phantasm of the imagination which keeps so many all their lifetime subject to bondage.

It is a pathetic reflection that all around us, even in our own homes and close to our hearts, there are those who lead their lives under the burden of an unspoken fear. These



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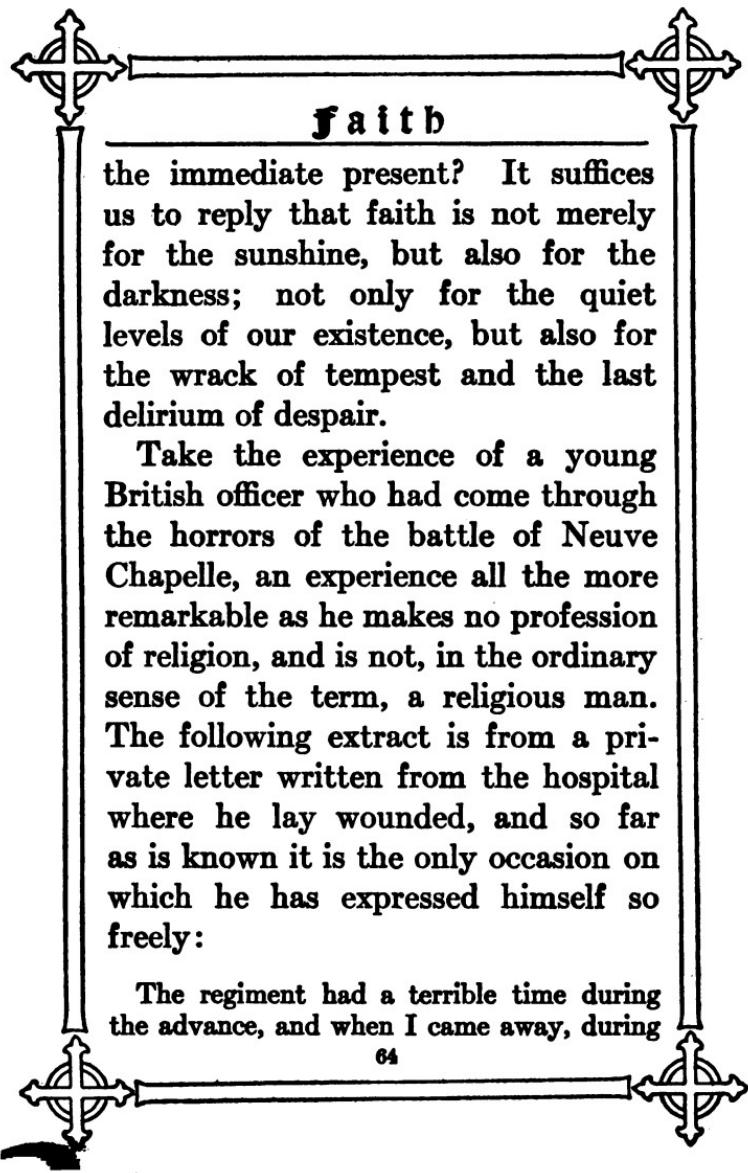
unhappy souls learn to keep silence, because when they have spoken they have been met only with ridicule or misunderstanding; and the very suppression of their misery leads to its intensification and fixes it more firmly in the subconscious. Much may be done by analyzing the fear, by laying bare its hidden roots, by seeing how it took origin in the mind. We fear the unknown; but half our fear has vanished when the unknown has been forced to give up its secret. But if a genuinely regenerative force is to enter the life and make peace and poise a permanent possession, something more is needed. Faith in the goodness of life, in the creative spirit of the universe, in the honor of men and in the virtue of women, in the powers of the human soul, and, if by the grace of Heaven we can



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attain to it, faith in a destiny rich in boundless possibility is the sovereign cure for this saddest distemper of the soul. No crisis is too great, no agony is too poignant, no upheaval of the foundations of existence too overwhelming for the constraining, steadyng, and uplifting energies of a moral trust.

One sometimes imagines oneself in a situation of terrible strain and stress, amid the terrors of shipwreck, or in the inferno of the modern battlefield, where the relentless forces of nature or the cruel engines of human ingenuity make havoc of youth, affection, beauty, the rich promise of the future as well as the garnered harvests of the past, and the doubt arises unbidden—what would faith in the invisible order of realities avail against the overpowering might of

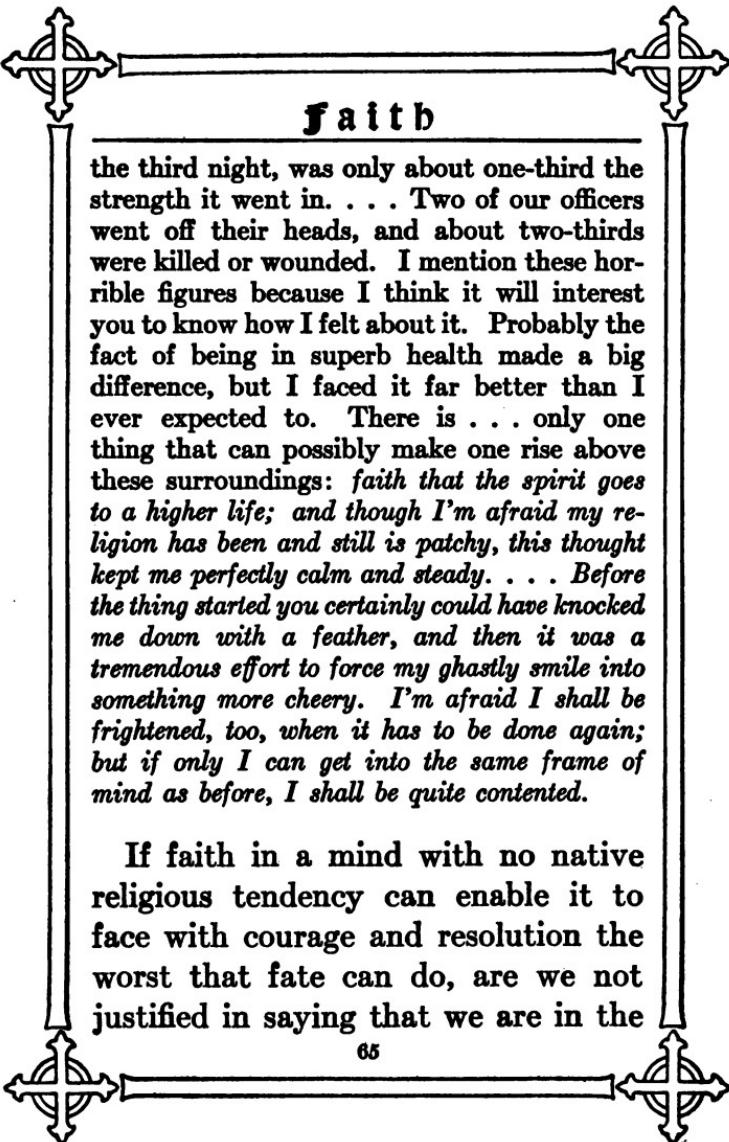


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the immediate present? It suffices us to reply that faith is not merely for the sunshine, but also for the darkness; not only for the quiet levels of our existence, but also for the wrack of tempest and the last delirium of despair.

Take the experience of a young British officer who had come through the horrors of the battle of Neuve Chapelle, an experience all the more remarkable as he makes no profession of religion, and is not, in the ordinary sense of the term, a religious man. The following extract is from a private letter written from the hospital where he lay wounded, and so far as is known it is the only occasion on which he has expressed himself so freely:

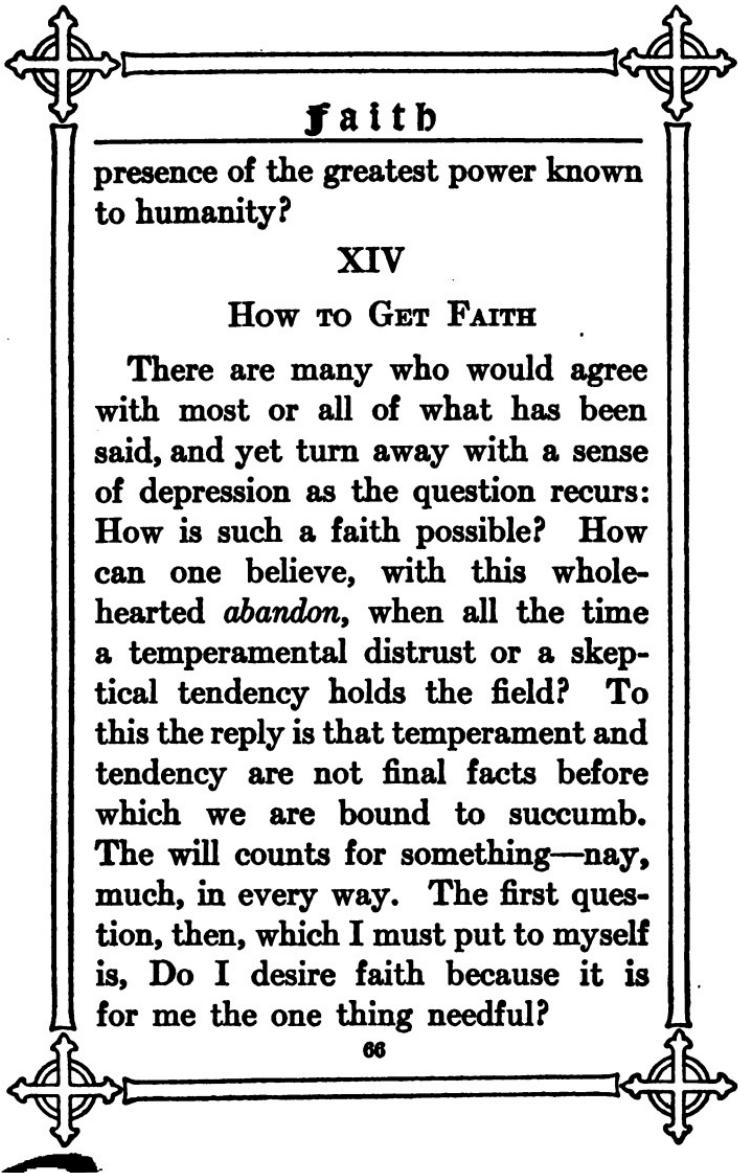
The regiment had a terrible time during the advance, and when I came away, during



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the third night, was only about one-third the strength it went in. . . . Two of our officers went off their heads, and about two-thirds were killed or wounded. I mention these horrible figures because I think it will interest you to know how I felt about it. Probably the fact of being in superb health made a big difference, but I faced it far better than I ever expected to. There is . . . only one thing that can possibly make one rise above these surroundings: *faith that the spirit goes to a higher life; and though I'm afraid my religion has been and still is patchy, this thought kept me perfectly calm and steady.* . . . Before the thing started you certainly could have knocked me down with a feather, and then it was a tremendous effort to force my ghastly smile into something more cheery. I'm afraid I shall be frightened, too, when it has to be done again; but if only I can get into the same frame of mind as before, I shall be quite contented.

If faith in a mind with no native religious tendency can enable it to face with courage and resolution the worst that fate can do, are we not justified in saying that we are in the



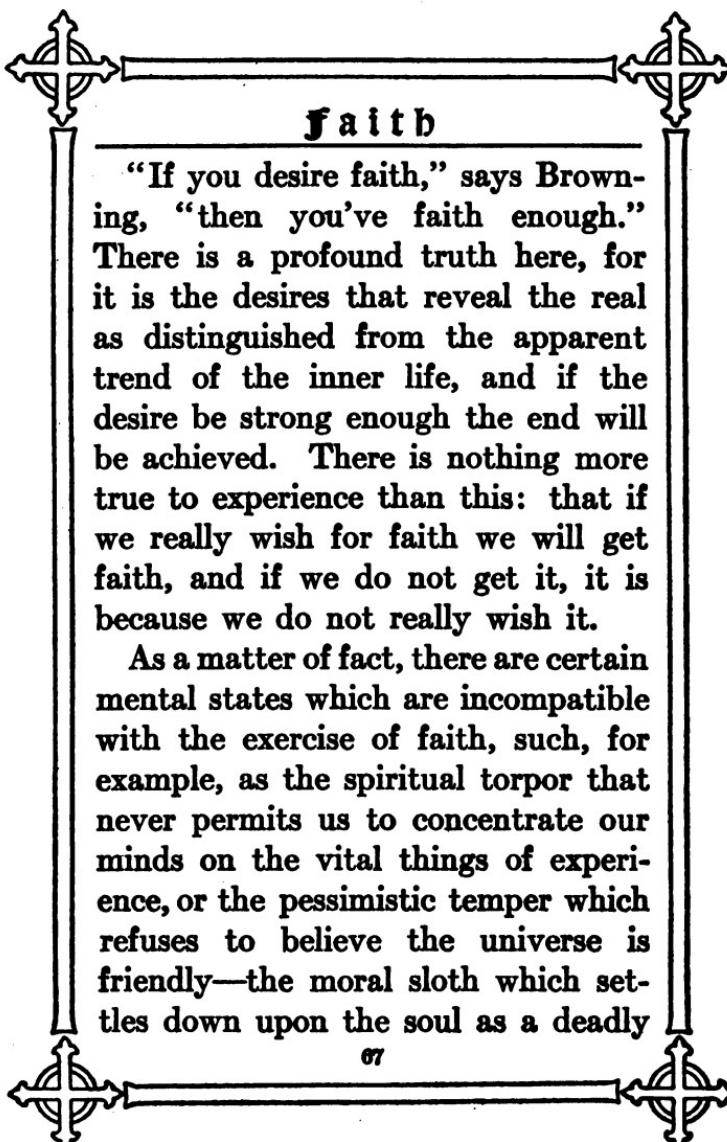
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presence of the greatest power known to humanity?

XIV

How to GET FAITH

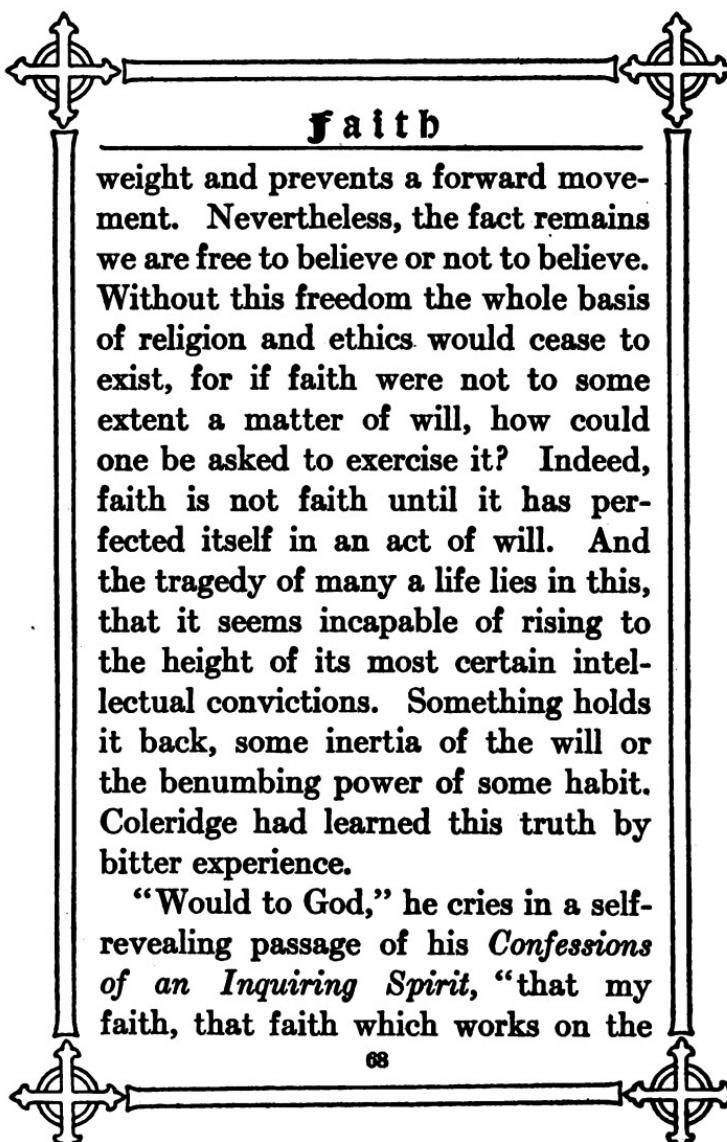
There are many who would agree with most or all of what has been said, and yet turn away with a sense of depression as the question recurs: How is such a faith possible? How can one believe, with this whole-hearted *abandon*, when all the time a temperamental distrust or a skeptical tendency holds the field? To this the reply is that temperament and tendency are not final facts before which we are bound to succumb. The will counts for something—nay, much, in every way. The first question, then, which I must put to myself is, Do I desire faith because it is for me the one thing needful?



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"If you desire faith," says Browning, "then you've faith enough." There is a profound truth here, for it is the desires that reveal the real as distinguished from the apparent trend of the inner life, and if the desire be strong enough the end will be achieved. There is nothing more true to experience than this: that if we really wish for faith we will get faith, and if we do not get it, it is because we do not really wish it.

As a matter of fact, there are certain mental states which are incompatible with the exercise of faith, such, for example, as the spiritual torpor that never permits us to concentrate our minds on the vital things of experience, or the pessimistic temper which refuses to believe the universe is friendly—the moral sloth which settles down upon the soul as a deadly



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weight and prevents a forward movement. Nevertheless, the fact remains we are free to believe or not to believe. Without this freedom the whole basis of religion and ethics would cease to exist, for if faith were not to some extent a matter of will, how could one be asked to exercise it? Indeed, faith is not faith until it has perfected itself in an act of will. And the tragedy of many a life lies in this, that it seems incapable of rising to the height of its most certain intellectual convictions. Something holds it back, some inertia of the will or the numbing power of some habit. Coleridge had learned this truth by bitter experience.

“Would to God,” he cries in a self-revealing passage of his *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, “that my faith, that faith which works on the



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whole man, confirming and conforming, were but in just proportion to my belief, to the full acquiescence of my intellect and the deep consent of my conscience." Nearer our own time, we have the painful confession of the English man of science, George John Romanes:

It is certain [he says] that there are agnostics who would greatly prefer being theists, and theists who would give all they possess to be Christians if they could thus secure promotion by purchase—*i.e.*, by a single act of will. But yet the desire is not strong enough to sustain the will in perpetual action so as to make the continual sacrifices which Christianity entails. Perhaps the hardest of these sacrifices, to an intelligent mind, is that of his own intellect. At least I am certain that this is so in my own case. I have been so long accustomed to constitute Reason my sole judge of truth that even though reason itself tells me it is not unreasonable to expect that the heart and will should be required to join with reason in seeking God (for religion

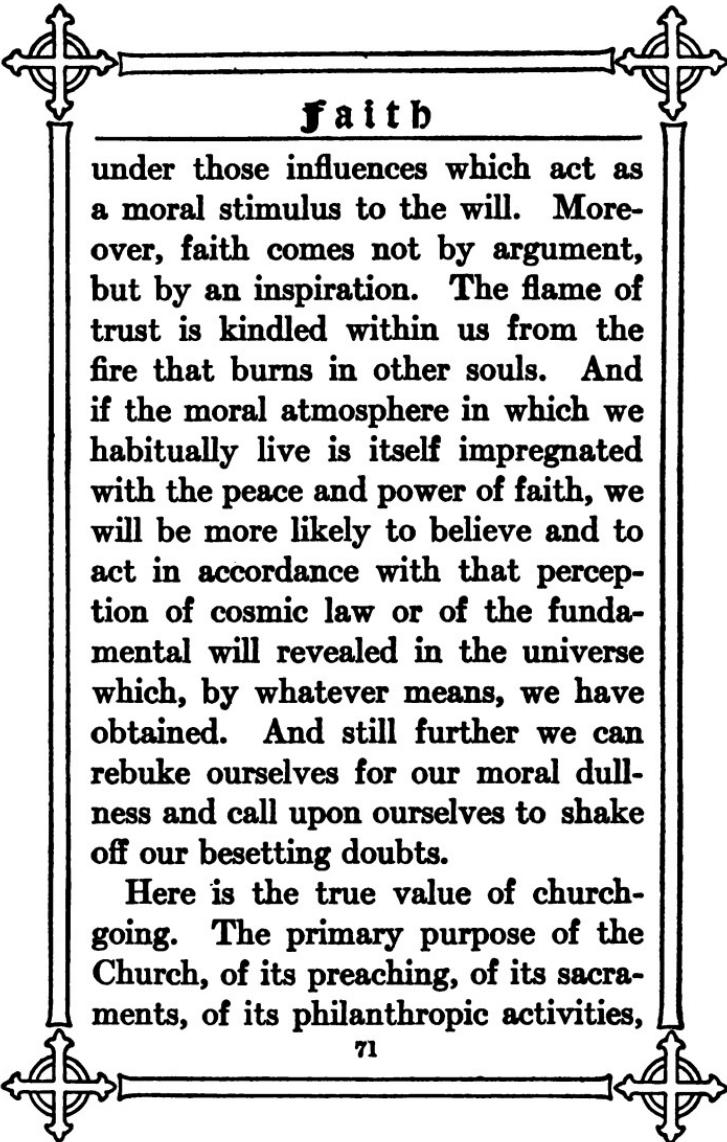


faith

is for the whole man), I am too jealous of my reason to exercise my will in the direction of my most heartfelt desires. For, assuredly, the strongest desire of my nature is to find that that nature is not deceived in its highest aspirations. Yet I cannot bring myself so much as to make a venture in the direction of faith. . . . Even the simplest act of will in regard to religion, that of prayer, has not been performed by me for at least a quarter of a century, simply because it has seemed so impossible to pray as it were hypothetically, that much as I have always desired to be able to pray, I cannot will the attempt.¹

How, then, is the will to be set in motion? If we complain that we have no will power, that we cannot resolve to obey the behest of reason and conscience, we will do well to remember that as the only cure for lack of thought-energy is to think, so the only cure for the lack of will-energy is to will. We can put ourselves

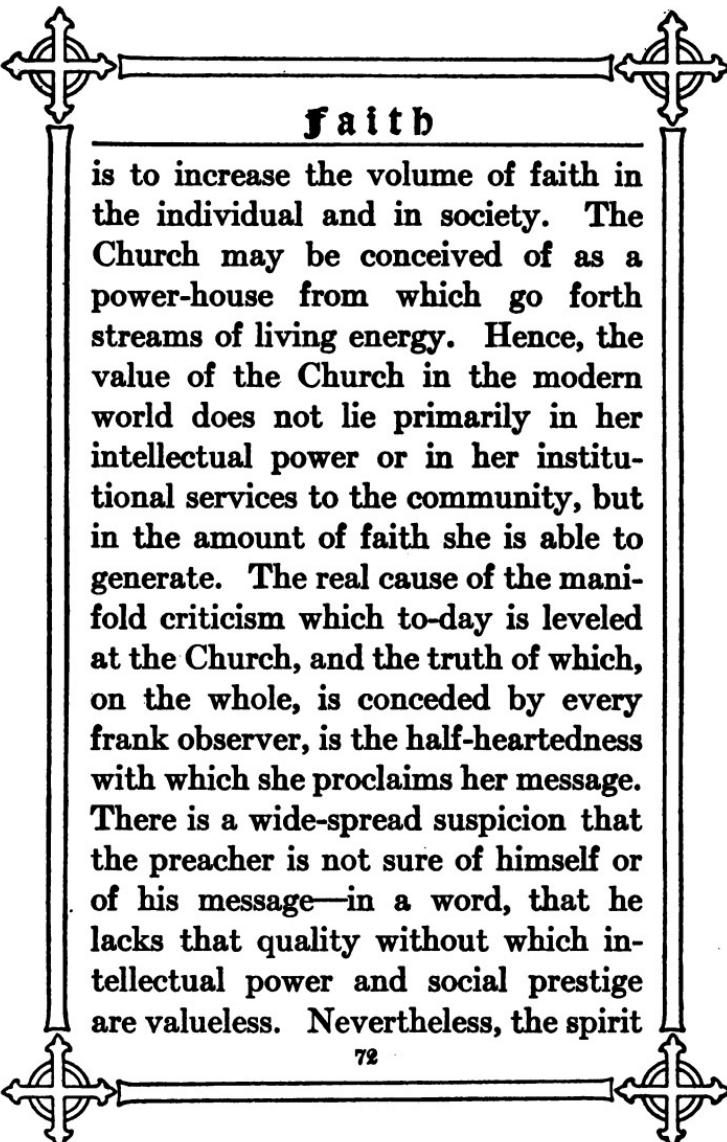
¹ *Thoughts on Religion*, pp. 182, 188.



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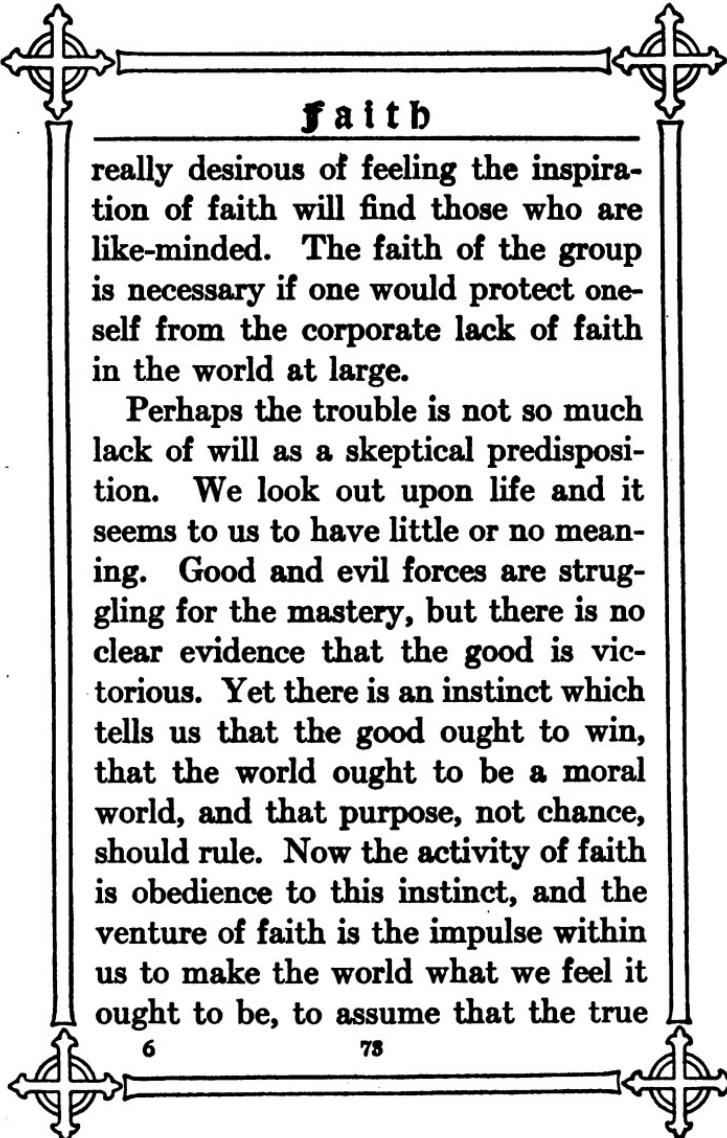
under those influences which act as a moral stimulus to the will. Moreover, faith comes not by argument, but by an inspiration. The flame of trust is kindled within us from the fire that burns in other souls. And if the moral atmosphere in which we habitually live is itself impregnated with the peace and power of faith, we will be more likely to believe and to act in accordance with that perception of cosmic law or of the fundamental will revealed in the universe which, by whatever means, we have obtained. And still further we can rebuke ourselves for our moral dullness and call upon ourselves to shake off our besetting doubts.

Here is the true value of church-going. The primary purpose of the Church, of its preaching, of its sacraments, of its philanthropic activities,



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is to increase the volume of faith in the individual and in society. The Church may be conceived of as a power-house from which go forth streams of living energy. Hence, the value of the Church in the modern world does not lie primarily in her intellectual power or in her institutional services to the community, but in the amount of faith she is able to generate. The real cause of the manifold criticism which to-day is leveled at the Church, and the truth of which, on the whole, is conceded by every frank observer, is the half-heartedness with which she proclaims her message. There is a wide-spread suspicion that the preacher is not sure of himself or of his message—in a word, that he lacks that quality without which intellectual power and social prestige are valueless. Nevertheless, the spirit



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really desirous of feeling the inspiration of faith will find those who are like-minded. The faith of the group is necessary if one would protect oneself from the corporate lack of faith in the world at large.

Perhaps the trouble is not so much lack of will as a skeptical predisposition. We look out upon life and it seems to us to have little or no meaning. Good and evil forces are struggling for the mastery, but there is no clear evidence that the good is victorious. Yet there is an instinct which tells us that the good ought to win, that the world ought to be a moral world, and that purpose, not chance, should rule. Now the activity of faith is obedience to this instinct, and the venture of faith is the impulse within us to make the world what we feel it ought to be, to assume that the true

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and the good will ultimately be found at one. If we make this assumption and guide our lives by it we shall verify our faith by the freedom and the expansion and the effectiveness which will be our experience.

XV

FAITH IN HUMAN NATURE

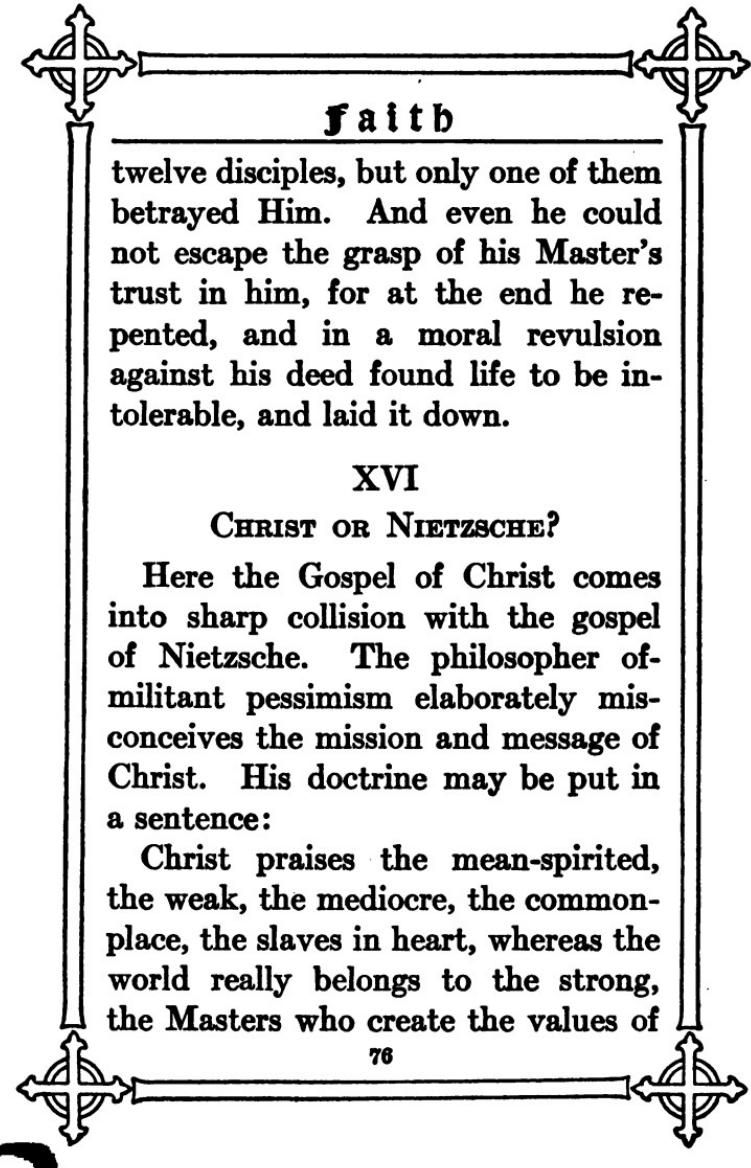
And so, too, with the pessimistic want of faith in our fellow-men.

This cynical disbelief in the trustworthiness of human nature can be cast out and kept out only by the deliberate assumption of the opposite. Act as if your fellow-men were worthy of trust, and you will find that in the vast majority of cases your assumption will verify itself. The truth is that our faith in others has a creative quality. It awakens within men de-



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sires, ambitions, dreams of which they had never suspected themselves capable. We are encouraged to exercise this faith by the example of those who have by their faith moved humanity to higher issues. All great leaders of men have trusted those whom they led. Luther awoke Germany from her age-long slumbers and gave her religious liberty. But Luther never could have achieved his mighty task had it not been that the dynamic quality of his faith in the greatness of the German spirit helped to create that very greatness. Lincoln's faith in America could not have sustained its mighty burden had it not been met by the faith of the nation which he led. But the best illustration is found in the power of Christ's faith to make heroes and heroines out of commonplace men and women. He chose



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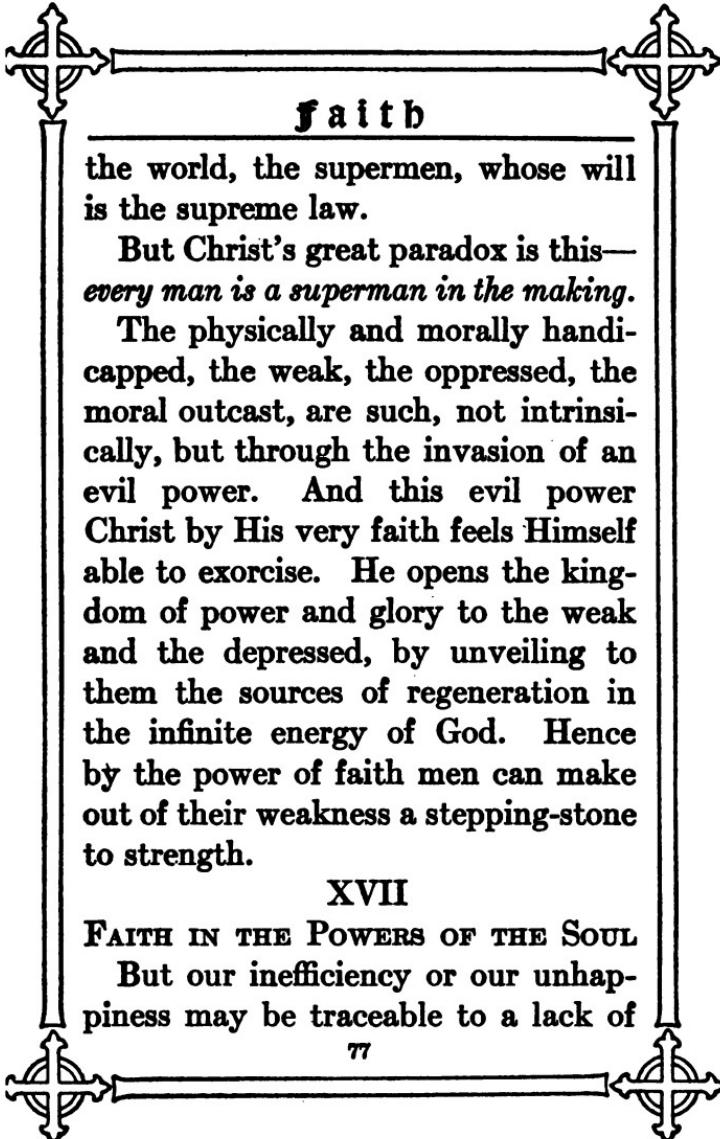
twelve disciples, but only one of them betrayed Him. And even he could not escape the grasp of his Master's trust in him, for at the end he repented, and in a moral revulsion against his deed found life to be intolerable, and laid it down.

XVI

CHRIST OR NIETZSCHE?

Here the Gospel of Christ comes into sharp collision with the gospel of Nietzsche. The philosopher of militant pessimism elaborately misconceives the mission and message of Christ. His doctrine may be put in a sentence:

Christ praises the mean-spirited, the weak, the mediocre, the commonplace, the slaves in heart, whereas the world really belongs to the strong, the Masters who create the values of



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the world, the supermen, whose will is the supreme law.

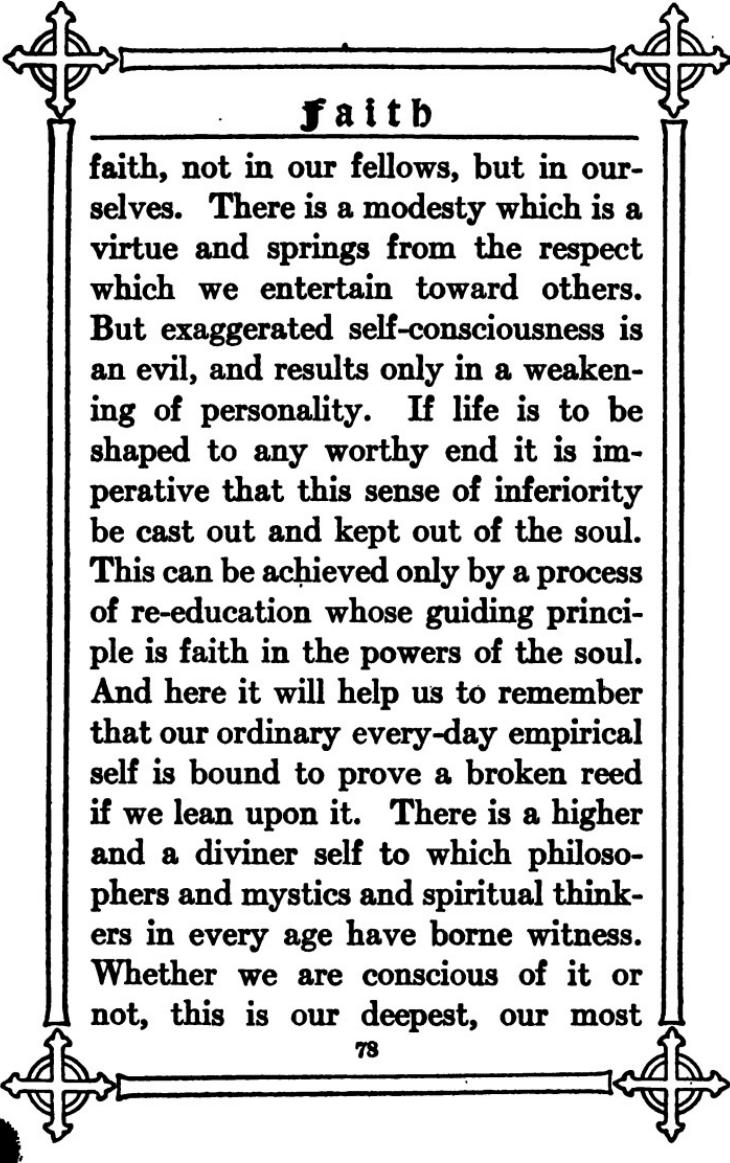
But Christ's great paradox is this—*every man is a superman in the making.*

The physically and morally handicapped, the weak, the oppressed, the moral outcast, are such, not intrinsically, but through the invasion of an evil power. And this evil power Christ by His very faith feels Himself able to exorcise. He opens the kingdom of power and glory to the weak and the depressed, by unveiling to them the sources of regeneration in the infinite energy of God. Hence by the power of faith men can make out of their weakness a stepping-stone to strength.

XVII

FAITH IN THE POWERS OF THE SOUL

But our inefficiency or our unhappiness may be traceable to a lack of



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faith, not in our fellows, but in ourselves. There is a modesty which is a virtue and springs from the respect which we entertain toward others. But exaggerated self-consciousness is an evil, and results only in a weakening of personality. If life is to be shaped to any worthy end it is imperative that this sense of inferiority be cast out and kept out of the soul. This can be achieved only by a process of re-education whose guiding principle is faith in the powers of the soul. And here it will help us to remember that our ordinary every-day empirical self is bound to prove a broken reed if we lean upon it. There is a higher and a diviner self to which philosophers and mystics and spiritual thinkers in every age have borne witness. Whether we are conscious of it or not, this is our deepest, our most



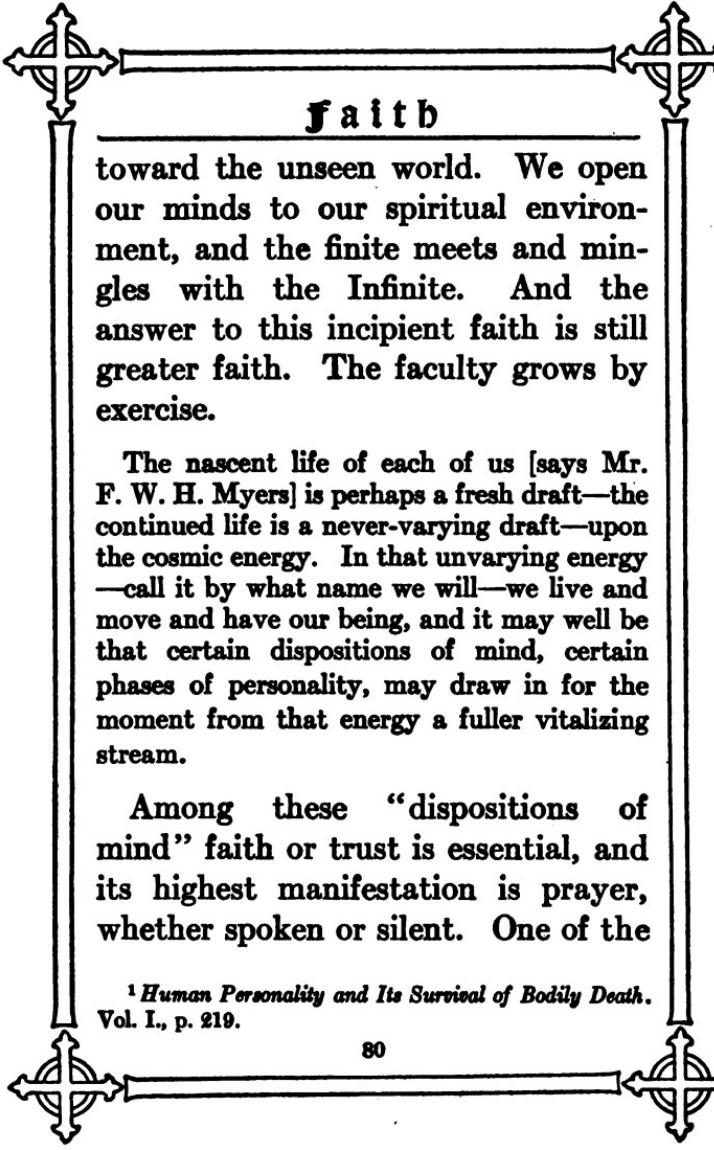
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real self. Let us trust it, and we will find inspiration, freedom, courage, and a peace which passeth all understanding. The sense of incapacity vanishes; the fear of man dies; the distractions of the attention, divided between ourselves and the task in hand, no longer disturb us. Go where we will, we feel ourselves masters of our minds and of the situation.

XVIII

WHAT THE PRAYER OF FAITH CAN DO

The most characteristic expression of religious faith is prayer. Paradoxical though it sounds, we can and ought to pray for faith, and yet without faith our prayer can find no response. This paradox is resolved by the fact that in prayer the faith faculty which we all possess turns



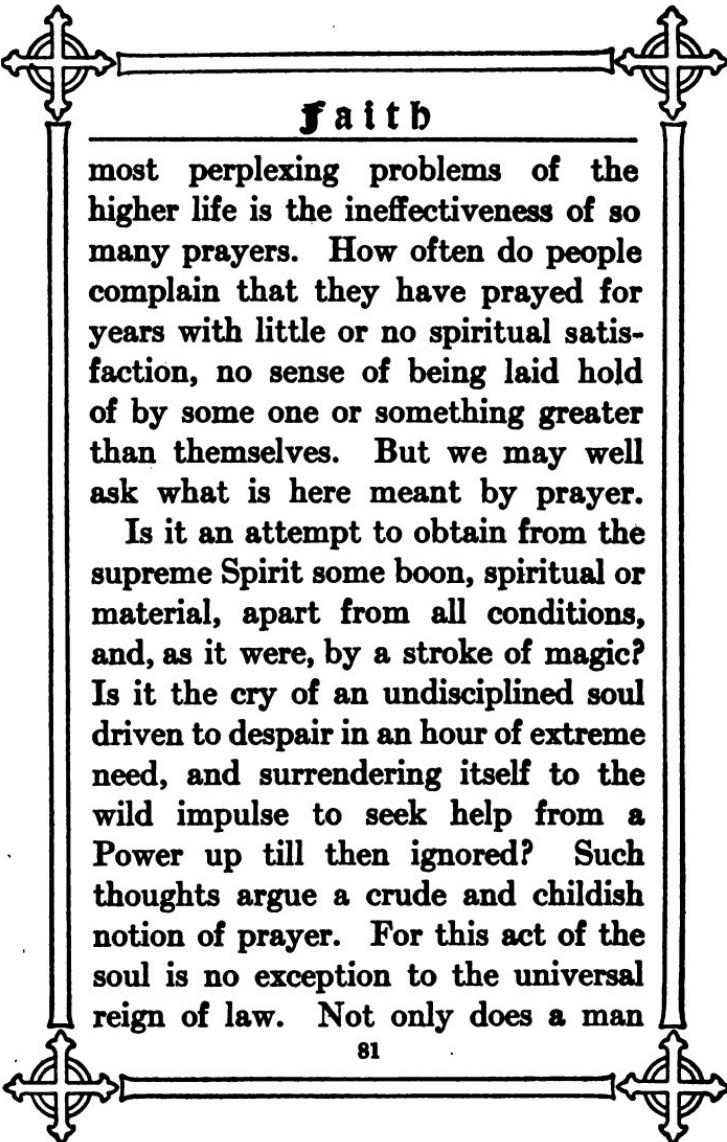
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toward the unseen world. We open our minds to our spiritual environment, and the finite meets and minglesthe Infinite. And the answer to this incipient faith is still greater faith. The faculty grows by exercise.

The nascent life of each of us [says Mr. F. W. H. Myers] is perhaps a fresh draft—the continued life is a never-varying draft—upon the cosmic energy. In that unvarying energy —call it by what name we will—we live and move and have our being, and it may well be that certain dispositions of mind, certain phases of personality, may draw in for the moment from that energy a fuller vitalizing stream.

Among these “dispositions of mind” faith or trust is essential, and its highest manifestation is prayer, whether spoken or silent. One of the

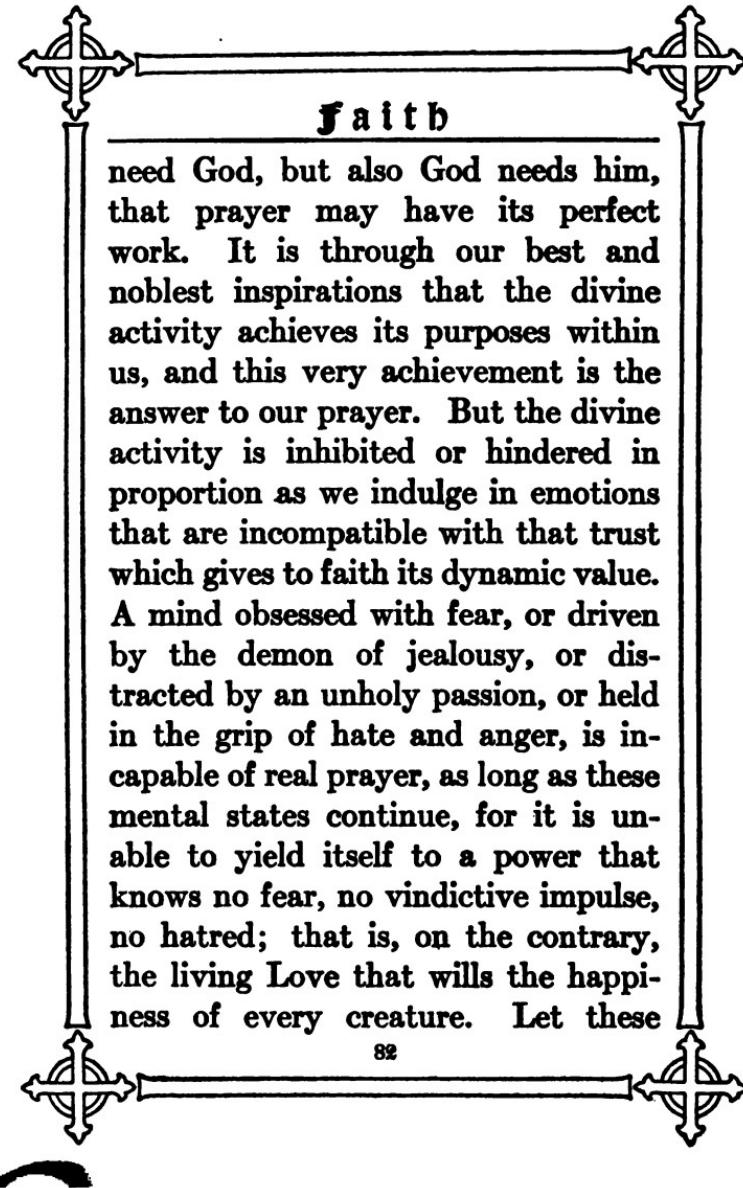
¹ *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death.*
Vol. I., p. 219.



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most perplexing problems of the higher life is the ineffectiveness of so many prayers. How often do people complain that they have prayed for years with little or no spiritual satisfaction, no sense of being laid hold of by some one or something greater than themselves. But we may well ask what is here meant by prayer.

Is it an attempt to obtain from the supreme Spirit some boon, spiritual or material, apart from all conditions, and, as it were, by a stroke of magic? Is it the cry of an undisciplined soul driven to despair in an hour of extreme need, and surrendering itself to the wild impulse to seek help from a Power up till then ignored? Such thoughts argue a crude and childish notion of prayer. For this act of the soul is no exception to the universal reign of law. Not only does a man



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need God, but also God needs him, that prayer may have its perfect work. It is through our best and noblest inspirations that the divine activity achieves its purposes within us, and this very achievement is the answer to our prayer. But the divine activity is inhibited or hindered in proportion as we indulge in emotions that are incompatible with that trust which gives to faith its dynamic value. A mind obsessed with fear, or driven by the demon of jealousy, or distracted by an unholy passion, or held in the grip of hate and anger, is incapable of real prayer, as long as these mental states continue, for it is unable to yield itself to a power that knows no fear, no vindictive impulse, no hatred; that is, on the contrary, the living Love that wills the happiness of every creature. Let these

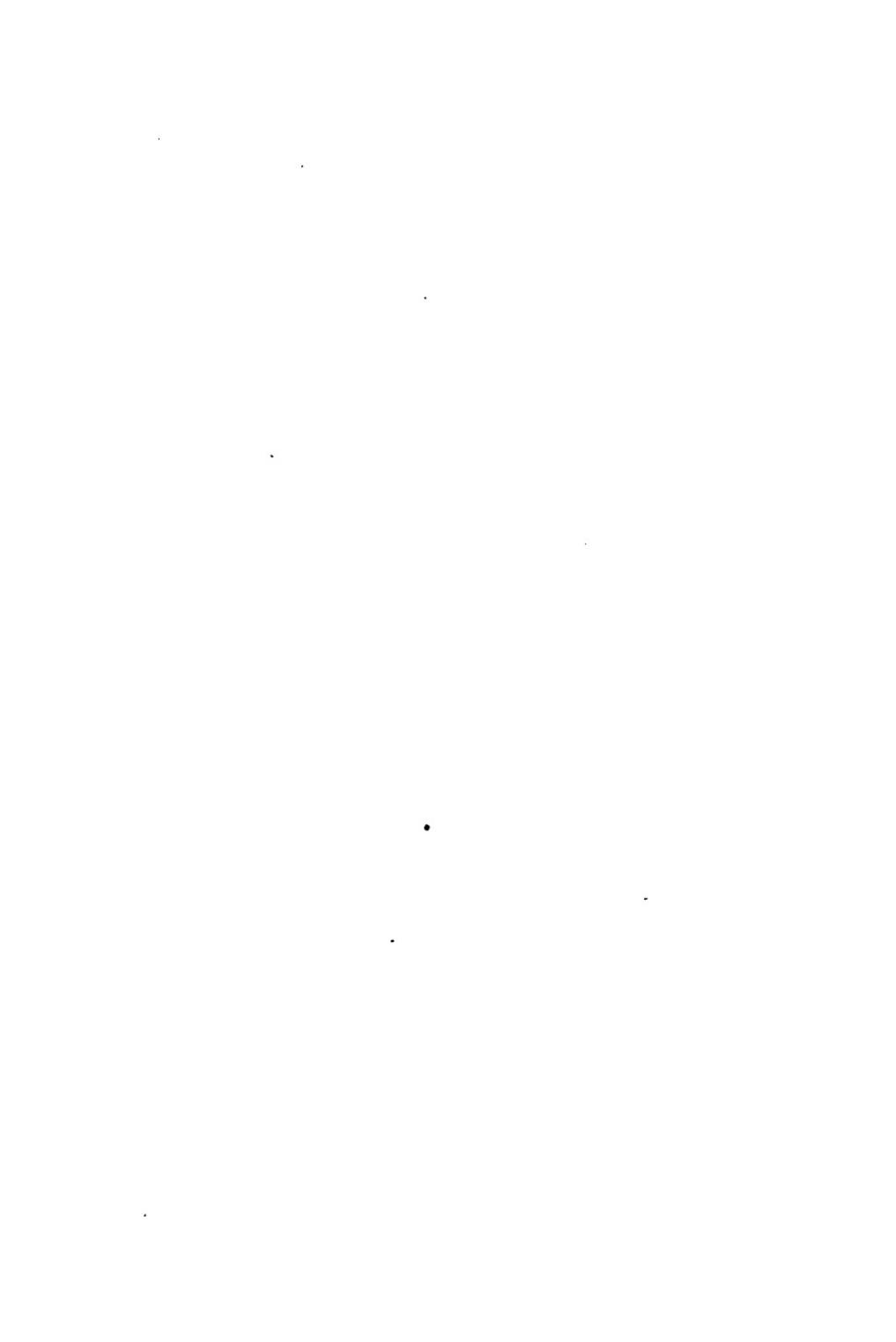
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negative thoughts and feelings give place to their opposites—thoughts and feelings that unify and enlarge the soul, and at once the sealed-up fountain of divine energy is released and man allies himself with God and becomes with Him the creator of spiritual reality which has its echo even in the material universe. No man need remain in hell, the hell created by his own sinister and dark imaginings. He can rise to any heaven of inner peace and harmony he desires, and when he chooses so to rise all the nobler forces of the universe conspire to help him upward. It is this faith that can transfigure the saddest shame and the blackest despair and turn the last weakness of life into victorious strength.

THE END







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